



Ag Vision 2030 group releases strategic plan

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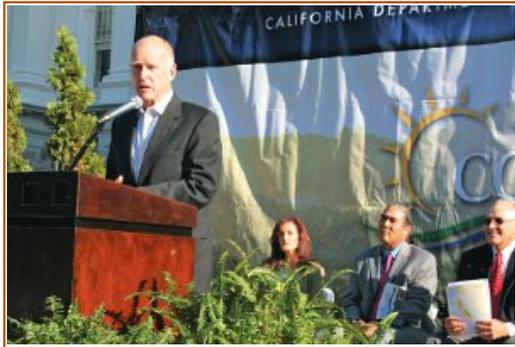
By Christine Souza
Assistant Editor

After a two-year process, the California State Board of Food and Agriculture and partner organizations unveiled a dozen recommendations aimed at securing the future of agriculture in the nation's largest farm state. During an event outside the state Capitol last week, the group released a strategic plan for agriculture and food systems known as California Agricultural Vision 2030, Ag Vision for short.

The plan addresses responses to the rapidly growing list of challenges facing agriculture, from regulations and water supply to urbanization and climate change.

Intended to be part of a continuing process, the Ag Vision recommendations are based on discussions among representatives from environmental, labor, food access and nutrition organizations, as well as California farmers and ranchers.

"The Ag Vision recommendations reflect the combined needs of California's farmers and ranchers and those stakeholders interested in our food system," said state Food and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura. "Collaboration among these groups is key to creating a sustainable future within the agricultural sector."



Governor-elect Jerry Brown congratulates the Ag Vision committee on completion of the plan, which includes strategies for dealing with key issues including water supply and burdensome regulations. Listening, left to right, are committee co-chair Luawanna Hallstrom, state Food and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura and State Board of Food and Agriculture Chair Al Montna.



Members of the Ag Vision Advisory Committee gather outside the state Capitol to celebrate release of the plan. From left: Tim Johnson, California Rice Commission; Matt Byrne, California Cattlemen's Association; Eric Holst, Environmental Defense Fund; Rich Matteis, California Farm Bureau; Michael Dimock, Roots of Change; Al Montna, State Board of Food and Agriculture; Luawanna Hallstrom, State Board; A.G. Kawamura, secretary of Food and Agriculture; Ralph Grossi, American Farmland Trust; Ed Thompson, AFT; Dave Puglia, Western Growers; Ashley Boren, Sustainable Conservation; Paul Muller, Full Belly Farm; Sue Sigler, California Association of Food Banks; Paul Martin, Western United Dairywomen; and Cornelius Gallagher, Bank of America.

State Board of Food and Agriculture President Al Montna described Ag Vision as a living document and as something that he doesn't want to see "sit on the shelf."

"I insisted that the Ag Vision would be a continuing process of cooperation and definitive action resulting in a stronger and vibrant agriculture community," Montna said. "Ag Vision is a process that will transcend party lines, special interest groups and probably some of us. The Ag Vision report is a living document and it is on the table for discussion from any interest group that is interested in our industry."

"Ag Vision has identified some key action areas that need to be addressed in the near term if agriculture is to thrive, including enhancing water infrastructure and easing the regulatory burden on farmers and ranchers," said California Farm Bureau Federation Administrator Rich Matteis, a member of the Ag Vision Advisory Committee. "This plan is a point of embarkation, not a destination, and it will serve as a road map for agricultural and some non-traditional stakeholders to work together for the betterment of the industry."

The report released last Thursday, "California Agricultural Vision: Strategies for Sustainability," contains a dozen strategies that are to be implemented through 24 specific actions, some to be taken immediately and others over the longer term.

Strategies include: ease the burden of regulation on agriculture while maintaining health, safety and environmental standards; secure an adequate supply of water for agricultural purposes; improve access to safe, healthy food for all Californians; assure a strong labor force through fairness to agricultural workers and employers; effectively detect, exclude and control invasive species; adopt a policy of conserving agricultural land and water resources; expand environmental stewardship on farms and ranches; promote renewable energy and substitutes for fossil-based inputs; assure agricultural adaptation to climate change; promote robust regional markets for all California producers; cultivate the next generation of farmers and ranchers; and

promote agricultural research that anticipates 21st century challenges.

Edward Thompson Jr., American Farmland Trust California director, spoke about the immediate and longer-term actions endorsed by the state Board of Food and Agriculture.

"Our approach was, let's get some consensus on the doable things and then move forward," Thompson said.

For easing the regulatory burden on agriculture, for example, the immediate action was "to evaluate the pros and cons of a variety of institutional arrangements and to suggest alternatives for improving the administration of environmental and other regulations." The longer-term recommendation was to "document examples of regulations and other mandates that could be changed to reduce the burden and cost...while still fulfilling the purpose of the regulations."

"Let's do things a little differently so you don't have to get eight permits and it actually benefits the environment," Thompson said.

During the presentation to unveil the report, Governor-elect Jerry Brown took time away from working on the state budget to greet the Ag Vision committee members and related stakeholders.

"Certainly, producers from California of every size are facing challenges with water, soil, workers, pesticides, air, politicians...it is a mixed bag and pretty big," Brown said, adding that, as he works on solving state budget problems, "I think California is in for some good times after a certain period of difficult times."

Montna commented that Brown's appearance at the Ag Vision event shows that he is willing to work collaboratively with agricultural representatives.

"Farmers and ranchers cannot address opportunities and challenges ahead of us alone. We need to work together with a variety of stakeholders to assure that California agriculture contributes to healthy people, a healthy planet and a robust economy," Montna said.

Board of Food and Agriculture member Luawanna Hallstrom, a co-chair of the Ag Vision Advisory Committee, also emphasized the need for collaboration.

"Ag Vision challenges all of us to be better and to collaborate in dealing with the tough challenges that we face to find the best solutions that will provide the right balance," Hallstrom said.

For more information on Ag Vision, go to www.cdfa.ca.gov/agvision.

(Christine Souza is an assistant editor of Ag Alert. She may be contacted at csouza@cfbf.com.)

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