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21  
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Daily Journal Quick Poll

Earth Day is April 22, how will you mark the date?

- Participate in a cleanup day
- Be aware and appreciate the natural environment
- Remind myself to recycle
- Turn the compost pile
- Should do something, but probably nothing

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## OP-ED: Agriculture's climate protection solutions

April 21, 2012, 05:00 AM By Stephen E. Abbors and David Gates

When we think about ways to slow down climate change and avert the worst impacts of rising temperatures, what usually comes to mind are things like electric cars, weatherizing homes and putting up solar panels. But there are other significant climate solutions to be realized from one of the most important economic sectors in California — agriculture.

Farms and ranches offer unique opportunities to store, or "sequester" carbon dioxide in soil, trees and other woody plants. Research shows that some of the most promising "climate-friendly" farming practices include reducing synthetic nitrogen fertilizer use, managing soil to increase organic matter, pasture-based livestock management that decreases erosion and avoids overgrazing, and integrating perennial crops, forests and hedgerows into the farmscape.

Many climate-friendly farming practices have the added benefits of improving air and water quality, reducing reliance on fossil fuel-based inputs and increasing wildlife habitat and biodiversity.

These advantages serve as a buffer against the extremes of climate change that could hamper agricultural production and impact food security. Preserving farmland near urban areas can also limit the significant greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation and sprawl development.

But moving from the promise of solutions to their widespread adoption on California's working farm and ranch lands takes resources. We need more agricultural research, technical assistance for farmers and ranchers and, when there may be added risks such as decreases in crop yield, financial incentives to make the business of climate-friendly farming less risky.

That's where innovative state investments can make all the difference between a progressive agricultural economy or one that fails to meet the challenges of a changing climate.

This year, California's long-anticipated cap-and-trade program goes into effect. The ground was laid for the program in 2006 when former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act, the country's most comprehensive climate protection policy. Under the law, California must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

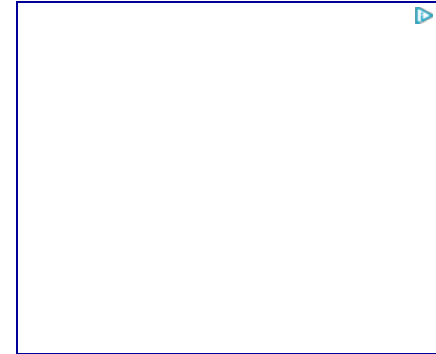
Beginning this year the first steps of implementing cap-and-trade will get under way with full implementation beginning in January 2013. The program puts a cap on the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, one that declines over time. These emitters must meet their cap by decreasing their actual emissions or by buying "offsets" on the carbon market. Those that emit less than their cap can trade or sell their permits or "allowances" to pollute.

An aspect of cap-and-trade that has been given relatively little attention until now is that the largest greenhouse gas emitters will be required to purchase a small portion of their allowances via an auction. The state will hold the first auction in November 2012 and quarterly auctions each year thereafter, generating hundreds of millions of dollars in public funds this year and increasing to several billions of cap-and-trade program revenue in future years.

How cap-and-trade revenue is invested could make all the difference in the success of the program. Importantly, Gov. Jerry Brown included "sustainable agriculture" in his budget proposal as an eligible allocation for cap-and-trade funds, recognizing both the potential for climate solutions from agriculture and the need for public investments to help maximize them.

This spring, as the Legislature takes up the question of investment priorities for cap-and-trade revenue, we hope they too will see the wisdom of investing in agricultural solutions to one of most pressing challenges in the years to come.

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