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BURROUGHS: Agriculture has 'shovel-ready' climate solutions

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Last month, Gov. Jerry Brown released the revision of his budget for 2013-14. Even though the taxes collected by the state this year were \$4.5 billion higher than predicted, the governor is taking an extremely cautious approach — too cautious when it comes to tackling climate change, which we think needs an aggressive approach.

We raise pastured dairy and beef cattle, pastured eggs, almonds and other crops on more than 5,000 acres in Merced County. We are used to dealing with weather variations, but in recent years the patterns have been more extreme and unpredictable.

As we head into another summer with less than 20 percent of normal snowpack in the Sierra — the lifeblood of Central Valley agriculture — we worry about the future. In fact, as a kind of insurance policy, we recently purchased land in Oregon where we expect there will be more secure water resources for future generations to continue farming.

Our children are fourth-generation California dairy farmers, and as we transition the business to them, we think a lot about what challenges they will face and how to support them in being successful. Doing what we can to reverse climate change and to build more resilience to climate impacts is on our list. We think it should be a high priority for the legislature and the governor, too.

Last year, the governor signed a bill, Assembly Bill 1532, outlining the most important ways to invest public funds raised by the state's new cap-and-trade program. We were glad to see sustainable agriculture and farmland conservation included.

Well-managed farms and ranches can store carbon in the soil, tree crops and forested areas. Farmers can reduce their use of energy and water and limit their fossil fuel inputs. Permanently protecting valuable farmland from urban sprawl can limit future increases in emissions.

These are the ultimate "shovel-ready" projects that also stimulate economic activity in California's rural communities, create jobs, ensure the long-term viability of California's productive food system, and provide environmental benefits such as cleaner air and water and open space.

But in the governor's recent budget proposal he delays any allocation of funds from the state's cap-and-trade program, putting off for another year investing the anticipated \$500 million that will have been raised a year from now.

Fiscal prudence has its place, but in this case Brown is being penny wise and pound foolish. The long-term cost of delaying action on climate change dwarfs this modest investment.

There is no time to waste in unleashing the potential for agriculture to help slow climate change. All eyes are on California as it rolls out its cap-and-trade program, and we have the chance to be a model for others around the world for taking bold and creative action.

The governor recently told a group of college graduates that the challenge of their lifetime was to tackle climate change. We think he should follow his own counsel and make use of every available resource without delay. The sooner we start investing in community-based climate solutions, the greater the impact on curbing climate change and avoiding huge economic, social and ecological harm.

Burroughs lives in Denair.