



News from the California Climate & Agriculture Network

January 14, 2014




Governor Brown Invests in Agriculture's Climate Solutions

On January 9th, Governor Brown released his [budget draft](#) for

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fiscal year 2014/15, and we are encouraged by the inclusion of investments in climate-friendly agricultural practices and farmland conservation.

Specifically, the draft budget includes a total allocation of \$850 million from the state's cap-and-trade program, including \$100 million of the [\\$500 million the Governor borrowed last year from the program](#). CalCAN and many other environmental, clean energy and social justice advocates have been [calling on the Governor](#) for several months to repay the borrowed funds and make good on his statements of concern about addressing climate change.

While the bulk of the cap-and-trade allocations in next year's draft budget are for high-speed rail, clean transportation and energy efficiency, some funds will also go towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions by investing in farmland preservation and agricultural management strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cut energy and water use and sequester carbon in soil.

Under the proposed budget, the spending categories that will benefit farmers are as follows:

- \$100 million to implementing regional Sustainable Community Strategies that include agricultural land preservation as a component of integrated land use and transportation planning
- \$50 million for water infrastructure and watershed projects, which will support water use efficiency in agriculture and watershed protection
- \$20 million for agricultural management strategies that improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions

At CalCAN, we have long argued that California farmers and ranchers can make powerful contributions to slowing climate change, including farming practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, produce clean energy and sequester carbon. We will continue to seek the full repayment of the remaining \$400 million the Governor borrowed last year, some of which should be allocated to climate-friendly farming practices. We see this budget proposal as a good first step towards investing in sustainable agricultural climate solutions that benefit farmers, our environment and all Californians.

CalCAN is a coalition of organic and sustainable agriculture organizations that advances policies to provide resources for climate-friendly farming practices.

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Drought Underscores the Need for Adaptation Planning

This is the first in a three-part series about the ongoing drought in California. Parts two and three will explore past droughts and our recommendations for sustainable water management practices.

Growers across California are among the first to feel the effects of the worst drought the state has seen in almost four decades. Mandated cutbacks in water distributions, along with depletions in available surface water and groundwater, are forcing farmers to dig deeper into their pockets while making tough decisions about crop planting and livestock management.

Generally, California relies on a few infrequent yet significant storms that make their way south from the Pacific Northwest during the winter months. This year, however, a warm and dry high-pressure system has lingered above the California coast since November, blocking storms that typically drop early winter precipitation across the state.

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CalCAN is the only organization in the country focused solely on climate change and sustainable agriculture. Don't miss out on a single post – [sign up](#) to follow CalCAN's blog today!



Net Energy Metering Pending Rules Changes

Over the past several months, CalCAN has been actively advocating on behalf of agricultural renewable energy producers on two related issues under consideration by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). They both concern aspects of the state's Net Energy Metering (NEM) program, which allows renewable energy producers to hook up their generators to the grid and receive credit for the clean energy they produce.

[AB 327 was signed into law last year](#) and requires the CPUC to make a number of reforms to the NEM program by 2017. An early decision the CPUC must make is how long current NEM customers can keep their existing rate structures and energy credits. The major investor-owned utilities are asking for shorter periods of 10 to 15 years, but CalCAN and its

allies argue that this 'transition period' should last the expected life of renewable energy systems, or about 30 years. We have also urged the CPUC to make a quick determination, as prospective NEM customers need economic certainty about the investments they are considering.

In addition to submitting formal comment to the CPUC, more than a dozen CalCAN farmer allies also submitted a letter urging the CPUC to act decisively to reduce uncertainty and respect the expectations of farmers who have made good-faith investments in on-farm renewable energy. The CPUC has until March 31st to issue a decision.

We are also awaiting CPUC action implementing another Net Energy Metering bill — [SB 594](#), which allows farms to site renewable energy systems more efficiently by removing restrictions on aggregating production across multiple electric meters. The Commission has received input from stakeholders, including many of our partners, and CPUC staff is currently reviewing that information. A number of issues related to billing and on-the-ground implementation have yet to be resolved. We will continue to track the issue and let you know when the new rules go into effect so farmers can take advantage of the changes. Read more about the history and implications of this effort [here](#).



Farm Bill Fits & Starts

Reposted with permission from the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#)

The [New Year hopes](#) for quick action on a new five-year farm bill in the first half of January are fading as negotiations on certain issues stall. At the beginning of this week, the House and Senate lead negotiators were making progress on a compromise bill, and there were rumors of a possible meeting on Thursday of the conference committee. As the week progressed, however, compromises on certain major

issues eluded the negotiators, causing the completion of a new farm bill to be further delayed.

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NRCS Investments in California Agriculture Conservation

Modified from a [California NRCS press release](#)

NRCS California invested \$102.8 million in working lands conservation programs, and when contributions by farmers and ranchers are included this figure rises to at least \$180 million. Additionally NRCS invested over \$21.1 million in easement projects that preserve and restore California farmlands, wetlands, grasslands and forests.

Each farmer and rancher partner voluntarily invest time and money in protecting and restoring natural resources under their care, and worked with NRCS to create a conservation plan to identify and schedule the conservation practices needed to conserve and protect water, soil, air and habitat on the land.

Modified from a press release January 14, 2014

NRCS California has approved four proposed project areas to be added to its three-year old Bay Delta Initiative, bringing the total number of project areas to 15. Farm and conservation groups in the approved areas work with farmers from Colusa to Bakersfield on voluntary projects to conserve and protect water and wildlife habitat. Project sponsors are required to outline strategies to address one or more of the

Initiative's three priority resource goals: 1) Water conservation and irrigation management on irrigated cropland; 2) Water quality improvements including nutrient management and erosion control on irrigated cropland, dairies, and associated areas; 3) Ecosystem restoration for aquatic and wetland habitat. Farmers who wish to apply for contracts within these project areas must do so by March 21, 2014. More information is available [here](#).

CalCAN works closely with the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#) to protect and strengthen Farm Bill conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) and Farm and the Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP).



CSP Application Deadline Extended

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has [extended the deadline](#) for applications to participate in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Farmers and ranchers interested in enrolling in CSP now have until February 7 to submit their initial applications to NRCS, rather than the original deadline of January 17.

CSP is an innovative working lands conservation program that rewards farmers and ranchers for the conservation and environmental benefits they produce. In the first five enrollment years for CSP (2009–2013), approximately 46,000 farmers and ranchers have enrolled nearly 60 million acres of farm and ranch land. That land is now under five-year, renewable CSP conservation contracts valued at \$804 million a year.

Click [here](#) for information assembled by NSAC on the timeline and process for applying to enroll in CSP, including application ranking criteria and other helpful information.



NCAT Seeks Partners To Help Communities Cope with Drought

The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) is looking for partners in its Drought Relief Corps, a new service program being developed to help communities prepare for drought, lessen its impact when it comes, and recover from its effects. NCAT is recruiting a range of partner organizations interested in hosting DRC members in their communities for 11 months. Click [here](#) for more information.



Events

Webinar: USDA Cover Crop Termination Policy January 23, 2014, 2:00 – 3:30 EST

The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) will host a webinar to discuss the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent efforts to assure greater uniformity and clarity on its policy related to farmers who currently grow cover crops or may grow them in the future.

This policy arose out of the concern that farmers planting cover crops could lose their eligibility for crop insurance coverage of the following crop. The new policy addresses this concern, using science-based cover crop management guidelines accepted across USDA agencies. The webinar will focus on when and how can cover crops be terminated without jeopardizing valuable crop insurance coverage of the cash crops grown with them.

Click [here](#) for more information on speakers and to register.

Conservation Burn Workshop and Training February 14, 2014, 8:00am – 12:00pm

Santa Rosa Junior College Shone Farm, Forestville, CA

Open burning of woody debris is still a common practice in California agriculture and forestry. By replacing conventional open burn methods with conservation burning, landowners can reduce emissions (visible smoke and invisible chemicals and particles), improve air quality and conserve resources such as carbon. Biochar, a soil amendment, can be produced in the process. Peter Hirst, an energy and natural resources consultant, will be the presenter.

Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

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