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Healthy Soils Initiative Funded!

Mixed results on a package of climate & agriculture bills



Yesterday, California legislators established the Healthy Soils Program by providing first-time funding for the climate change and agriculture program and defining the program in statute. The final budget deal allocates \$7.5 million in cap-and-trade funds to launch the Healthy Soils Initiative, a program proposed early in 2015 by Governor Brown and championed by CalCAN for several years.

Importantly, among the suite of budget bills passed yesterday was [SB 859](#), which authorizes the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to establish and oversee the Healthy Soils Program, in consultation with a scientific advisory panel. It increases the number of advisory panel members and stipulates there must be three farmer advisors, including one organic producer, an advisor with technical on-farm field experience, and experts in agricultural conservation, resource management and human health or environmental science.

The bill defines “healthy soils” to mean “soils that enhance their continuing capacity to function as a biological system, increase soil organic matter, improve soil structure and water- and nutrient-holding capacity, and result in net long-term greenhouse gas benefits.”

Senator Lois Wolk played a key leadership role in establishing the Healthy Soils Program. She authored multiple bills over the years to establish a state climate change and agriculture program, including [SB 1350](#) (earlier in 2016) and [SB 367](#) (a CalCAN-sponsored bill in 2015).

Though the Healthy Soils budget falls short of the \$20 million proposed by the Senate and

supported by CalCAN and our partners, earlier this summer it seemed that the complex negotiations and politics surrounding California's climate policies could jeopardize any cap-and-trade allocations whatsoever, so we are pleased to see this program funded at all.

In addition to Healthy Soils, the SWEEP water conservation grants program received \$7.5 million and the Dairy Methane Program received \$50 million. The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, a farmland conservation and climate change program, will also be funded—likely at \$40 million as it was in fiscal year 2015/16—because it is part of the cap-and-trade budget that is automatically allocated.

Another important element of SB 859 is the inclusion of language CalCAN championed that states that methane reduction on dairies can be achieved with a diversity of strategies. Along with anaerobic digesters such alternative management strategies include open solar drying and composting of manure, pasture-based management, scrape conversion and solid separation technologies. When spending priorities for the \$50 million for the Dairy Methane Program are discussed, this language will be important to assure that not all the money will be spent on anaerobic digesters. You can learn more about [CalCAN's argument for diversified methane reduction strategies](#) by reading the report we produced in October 2015.

Since 2014, \$130 million in state funding has financed more than 400 projects that improve on-farm water use efficiency, conserve agricultural land at risk of development, and reduce dairy methane emissions. These additional funds, totaling \$105 million, will continue to ensure that California agriculture plays a role in addressing our climate crisis. These programs are among the first in the country to recognize that agriculture offers significant climate solutions.

With the passage of SB 32 and AB 197 last week, the legislature re-affirmed the state's commitment to reducing emissions through 2030 and sent a clear message to California's 76,000 farms and ranches that their help is needed in the fight against climate change.

Many thanks to all of you who lent your expertise and voices to achieving these victories!

Click to read our [press release](#).

For more information on California's groundbreaking climate smart agriculture programs, and to see a summary of CalCAN's leadership since 2010 in putting these programs in place, [click here](#).

Stay tuned for more details in a series of more detailed blogs we will post in the coming days. [Sign up for our blogs here](#)