

Another View: Ag an important part of state's climate effort

By Renata Brillinger

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Much has been made of the differences between California and the coming Trump administration in the weeks since the election. One of the starker contrasts between the two is their stance on addressing a changing climate. President-elect Trump made past claims that climate change is a hoax. In contrast, Governor Jerry Brown is making climate protection a legacy issue, moving the state toward a clean energy economy.

Some have said California will now be an island when it comes to tackling climate change mitigation and adaptation. We think of our collective work on climate change in California as a beacon of hope and a national model.

California is the world's sixth largest economy, and has an outsized role in blazing the trail for other countries and regions. The state has created jobs and balanced the budget while staying on track to meet the ambitious 2020 greenhouse gas reduction targets established under Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

New state climate change programs invest in community projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions through projects that improve public transit, renewable energy, water and energy efficiency, urban forestry, waste diversion and composting, and much more. Twenty-five percent of all climate funds must benefit socially disadvantaged communities, disproportionately impacted by pollution. But more can always be done.

One area of California's emerging leadership on climate change is the role of our farms and ranches in addressing climate change. There are unique and powerful contributions to be made by farming and ranching practices that improve water use efficiency, enhance soil health, increase biodiversity, and generate renewable energy. California farms not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they can actually draw down atmospheric carbon into soil and woody plants.

In recognition of the potential for agriculture to provide climate solutions, the state has launched several grants programs for "climate smart" farming practices. For example, in Yolo County alone, farmers have received more than \$1.2 million to fund water conservation (e.g., irrigation improvements, solar pumps, and soil moisture monitoring equipment) that both save water and reduce the energy needed to pump it. As the state enters its sixth year of drought, investments like these are essential not only for encouraging climate solutions but also to buffer farms against water scarcity.

Another program has provided grants that permanently protect more than 33,000 acres of agricultural land at risk of development in 17 California counties, avoiding increases in greenhouse gas emissions associated urban sprawl. This includes more than 9,000 acres of rangeland at risk of development in Napa and Yolo Counties.

In 2017, the California Department of Food and Agriculture will roll out the Healthy Soils Program. It will offer financial assistance to growers to implement new soil building management techniques that store carbon. No other state in the country supports farmers with incentives for this purpose.

Interest in these programs among growers has been high, likely because these climate smart practices not only provide constructive responses to climate change but because they make economic and practical sense. Reducing water use saves money; improving soil health can increase fertility and crop yields; placing farmland into

permanent easement can provide capital for improvements or help with retirement. State incentives can minimize the upfront risk associated with transitioning to new practices, purchasing new equipment or learning new approaches.

As California acts as a global beacon on climate change, it is critical to support farmers and ranchers in making their unique contributions for the benefit of rural and urban Californians, the environment, and the economy.

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