

Forum

Written by two CalCAN partners

As California leads the way in battling climate change, farmers are key players.

Sherwood Darington Greg Rawlings [Jun 8, 2017](#)

In April, Gov. Jerry Brown declared California's record drought over. But farmers statewide won't forget it, and they know there are ongoing challenges such as weather extremes and increasingly intense drought-flood cycles.

California is demonstrating international leadership on climate change. 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 Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

One area of California's emerging leadership on climate change is the role our farms and ranches play. There are unique and powerful contributions to be made by protecting farmland and accelerating practices that improve water efficiency, soil health and biodiversity. California farms not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they draw down atmospheric carbon.

New state climate change programs have started up to invest in projects that reduce emissions through public transit, renewable energy production, water and energy efficiency, land conservation and more. Brown's draft budget for 2017-18 sets aside more than \$2 billion for such investments.

In recognition of the potential for agriculture to provide solutions, the state has launched several grants programs for "climate smart" farming practices. In Monterey County, farmers have received almost \$4.8 million to fund water conservation, both saving water and reducing the energy needed to pump it. Investments like these are essential for encouraging solutions and to buffer farms against water scarcity.

Another program provided grants that permanently protect more than 33,000 acres of agricultural land at risk of development in 17 California counties. This includes almost 1,500 acres of farmland in Monterey County.

This summer, 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 that stores carbon. No other state in the country supports farmers with incentives like this.

Interest in these programs among growers has been high, likely because these climate-smart practices provide constructive responses to climate change and because they make economic and practical sense. Reducing water use saves money; improving soil health aids fertility and crop yields; planting hedgerows increases carbon stocks and creates pollinator and wildlife habitat.

There is every reason to believe Central Coast farmers and ranchers will continue to benefit from these programs as long as legislators – including Assemblymember Anna Caballero, D-Salinas, and State Sen. Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres – agree to make them available. The Legislature has until June 30 to approve next year’s budget.

As California acts as a global beacon on climate change, it is critical to support farmers and ranchers for the benefit of Californians, the environment and the economy.

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