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YOLO COUNTY NEWS

## Climate-smart ag in Yolo County

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**By Renata Brillinger**  
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Participants in the Center for Land-Based Learning's California Farm Academy Program took a field trip to Cannery Urban Farm in Davis. Courtesy photo

In the past several years, California has passed a dizzying array of climate laws and launched dozens of grants program to meet the state's ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. One of the engines for reaching the target is the cap-and-trade program. It has invested approximately \$5 billion in transportation, housing, forest management, agriculture and more. In May, Governor Brown proposed another \$1.3 billion for the coming fiscal year.

California now has a suite of four "climate-smart agriculture" incentives programs that do not exist anywhere else in the country. They are reaching farmers across the state, including in Yolo County where almost \$3 million in cap-and-trade revenue has been invested to support more than a dozen farms in transitioning to practices that reduce net greenhouse gas emissions.

Three of these farms are within a 20-mile radius of Davis. Taken together, they exemplify an impressive variety of approaches that farmers can take to reducing on-farm emissions and removing atmospheric carbon and sinking it in soil and woody plants.

For example, Wilson Vineyards near Clarksburg installed soil moisture probes that alert farmer David Ogilvie when water has saturated the root zone of the vines so he can stop irrigating. Ogilvie's plan is to apply this technology for two years on about 400 acres of the vineyard, with the help of a grant from the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program, or SWEEP.

If he likes the results, he plans to expand the practice throughout the remaining 700 acres of his family's fourth-generation farm.

The grant also enabled Ogilvie to replace old pumps with more energy-efficient ones, reducing their energy usage and greenhouse gas emissions and leading to triple savings of water, electricity and money. "Without SWEEP, I can guarantee we could not have afforded to make these critical improvements," Ogilvie said.

The Center for Land-Based Learning's California Farm Academy Program manages several farm business incubator sites that help beginning farmers take their first steps in agriculture. They recently got a grant from California's new Healthy Soils Program, one of only three urban farms in California that received a grant in 2018.

They will conduct a demonstration project, inviting farmers and others to learn from their experiences using compost and cover crops to improve the poor soils on one of their sites at the Cannery Urban Farm in Davis.

Soils rich in organic matter and living microorganisms not only serve as a carbon sink but also improve crop yields and water holding capacity on farms. Sridharan

Sethuratnam, director of CLBL's California Farm Academy, said, "Unless we decide to take care of our soils soon, they will be gone. The Healthy Soils Program provides the opportunity to choose a better future for California agriculture."

A different approach to climate mitigation is being undertaken by the California Rangeland Trust. CRT has secured several grants from the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program to permanently protect rangeland by purchasing conservation easements on the land, including for a ranch near Winters. This funding, in combination with other sources from wildlife and conservation agencies, will protect the rangeland from conversion to orchards, vineyards or rural ranchettes.

In addition to avoiding the increased greenhouse gas emissions associated with more energy-intensive land uses, keeping these large acreages in ranching provides groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration and wildlife habitat connectivity with adjacent natural areas, such as the nearby Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area. According to Nancy Schaffer, Bay Area Program Manager at CRT, "There is such strong demand from California ranching families to permanently conserve their land — approximately 400,000 acres on our active list — and this program helps us begin to meet the demand."

The use of these trailblazing grants programs, combined with the innovation of farmers and ranchers such as these in Yolo County, is serving as a model to the world. The availability of funding, however, is subject to annual deliberations by the legislature and the Governor. By mid-June, Yolo County's elected representatives, state Sen. Bill Dodd and Assemblywoman Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, along with the rest of the legislature, are expected to make decisions about how to invest the much-sought-after cap-and-trade revenue for the 2018-19 fiscal year.

— *Renata Brillinger is the executive director of California Climate & Agriculture Network. For more information, visit <http://calclimateag.org>*