Assessing the cost of climate impacts before they ‘collapse’ ag

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The state Senate heard a new bill that seeks to gather more data on the potential fiscal impacts of climate change in California.

The state has “a very good sense” of the science but needs a sector-by-sector analysis of the fiscal liabilities, according to the bill’s author, Sen. Henry Stern, who represents a section of Los Angeles suburbs. In a committee hearing on Tuesday, Stern called the issue a matter of getting ahead of droughts, floods, sea level rise and the extreme heat affecting farm labor productivity.

Sen. Anna Caballero of Salinas suggested the report includes agriculture’s role in sequestering carbon and that CDFA be consulted. Stern agreed, referring to the industry the “tip of the spear” when it comes to climate change.
“The mega drought is here now,” said Stern. “Groundwater subsidence is here right now. The potential falling of (farmland). It's all very scary.”

The measure, Senate Bill 1320 (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200SB1320), passed with one “no” vote but no other opposition.

In a statement of support, the California Climate and Agriculture Network pointed to food system risks as well, writing: "Do we have the regional diversity of farmers, food processors and distributors that we need to withstand shocks to our food system?"

The biggest concern for the bill is funding the measure during a recession. Stern said the costs for climate change outweigh the price tag for research. An extreme flood like the famous 1862 event that submerged the capital could cost California more than $700 billion, he pointed out. The disruptions to urban areas and agricultural lands alike “would break California.”

Stern also responded to opposition against putting a proposed $5 billion climate bond on the ballot in November at such a fiscally challenging time for the state. He said that argument “really mistakes the scope of the fight we're in.”

*Top photo: Sen. Stern, presented his bill from behind a mask as well as a plexiglass sneeze guard.*

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