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New Water Bond Aims Funding at Agricultural Water Savings – Sustainable Agriculture Groups Support

California farmers and ranchers have something to celebrate in the new water bond, recently approved by the legislature and Governor Brown for the November ballot. The water bond includes \$100 million for water use efficiency projects in agricultural and urban areas. CalCAN advocated for the inclusion of funding to support on-farm water use efficiency projects, which past bonds had failed to adequately include.

“California has a lot to gain by investing in on-farm water use efficiency projects,” said Jeanne Merrill, CalCAN Policy Director. “The new water bond will bring us closer to realizing important water savings while keeping farmers on the land.”

At a time of severe drought, the water bond will bring an important infusion of funding for conservation, water recycling, groundwater and safe drinking water projects. The \$7.45 billion water bond is not without controversial elements, including \$2.7 billion for new dams and reservoirs.

“We need to support innovations in water use efficiency on the farm and across the state,” said Craig McNamara, President of the State Board of Food and Agriculture and owner of Sierra Orchards. “The new water bond will support a 21st century California.”

A recent analysis of past state water bonds conducted by the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) found that few dollars went toward supporting farmers in improving water use efficiency on their land. For example, of the \$37 million from Proposition 50 that funded agricultural water use efficiency since 2005, nearly three-quarters of the funding has gone to infrastructure and engineering projects such as pipelines, canals and pumps. Only 8 percent of those funds have helped farmers implement proven, inexpensive on-farm water conservation practices such as irrigation scheduling, soil moisture monitoring, or keyline design.

“With Governor Brown’s leadership, California will be able to work with family farmers to achieve real water savings by modernizing irrigation districts, optimizing on-farm water use and managing groundwater recharge,” said Dave Runsten, CAFF Policy Director. “The new water bond will allow us to realize significant benefits for farmers and the state.”

A summary and full report on the CAFF water bond analysis can be found at
<http://www.caff.org/programs/policy/water>

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