



CalCAN
CALIFORNIA CLIMATE &
AGRICULTURE NETWORK
2024 SUMMIT

Summit Leadership Awards Announced

On October 30th at the 8th California Climate and Agriculture Summit, five Climate Leadership Awards will be presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions in their fields to accelerate a transition to a healthy, just and climate-resilient farming system, and who have also demonstrated the ability to collaborate across disciplines and approach their work holistically.

This year's awardees are:



**Policymaker: Assemblymember Lori Wilson, District 11
(Fairfield/Vacaville)**

Elected to the California Assembly in 2022, Assemblymember Wilson is Chair of the California Legislative Black Caucus and the Transportation Committee. She quickly established herself as a champion of a healthy, just and resilient food and farming system. In 2023, she introduced AB 408 and for two years worked closely with the bill's sponsors, the Food and Farm Resilience Coalition, to propose a range of climate bond investments in the food and farming system. It is due in no small part to her leadership that Proposition 4 is on the November ballot and includes hundreds of millions of dollars of investments in climate smart agriculture, weatherization of farmworker housing, safe drinking water, farmers market infrastructure, farmland conservation, and more.



**Farmer/Rancher: Steven Cardoza, Cardoza & Cardoza Farming Co.
(Fresno County)**

Steven is a second-generation organic raisin grape grower near Fresno who joined CalCAN's farmer advisory council in 2019, just a few years after returning to the family farm to join his father in running the operation. He was an early recipient of a Healthy Soils Program demonstration grant and is a generous and enthusiastic host of farm tours where he shares his experiences with other farmers, advocates, researchers, policymakers and technical assistance providers. He has testified in the Capitol and is always ready to share his stories with reporters and on social media. He also serves as a board member of CCOF, a member



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of the CalCAN coalition. Steven is an innovative farmer, always curious about how to improve his practices, and is a continual source of insight and inspiration.



Technical Assistance Professional: Mike Griffin, formerly at Organic Valley

Mike spent most of his career working for Clover Sonoma and Organic Valley, supporting family dairy producers to remain economically viable and environmentally sustainable. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of every dairy farm and farm family up and down the north coast of California. For years, Mike has organized “pasture club” gatherings to bring producers together to learn about the latest innovations and grapple with shared challenges. He is a staunch champion for the Alternative Manure Management Program which funds dairy farms to install methane-reducing equipment, and collaborates with CalCAN to organize farm tours for farmers, legislators and agency staff to raise awareness about the program’s many benefits.



Researcher: Devii Rao, UC Cooperative Extension

Devii is the UC Cooperative Extension Livestock Advisor serving San Benito, Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. Her applied research at the nexus of livestock grazing, wildfire, and climate change has filled critical research gaps, fostered regional collaborations like the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association, and influenced local and state climate policies. Devii served for two years on an expert advisory committee that advised three state agencies in developing the state’s first quantifiable, time-bound goals for working lands climate solutions. Devii joined CalCAN’s Science Advisory Council in 2019 and has consistently provided timely expertise on legislation to advance prescribed grazing and prescribed fire. Her pragmatism and collaboration have earned her high esteem from ranchers and other partners, and we count ourselves lucky to be among them.



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Special Recognition: Dave Runsten, Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF)

Dave is a founding member of the CalCAN coalition dating back to 2009. As CAFF's Policy Director for many years, he worked closely with CalCAN's policy staff and was always ready to share his strategic perspectives and his relationships with agency and legislative staff in service of advancing CalCAN's campaigns. He could be counted on to join meetings with policymakers, speak at events and hearings, and to do the tireless and often invisible work of analyzing policy proposals and evaluating amendments to bills and regulations. Dave's current focus at CAFF is on ensuring that small farms have equitable access to groundwater as the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) moves forward. His deep commitment to the well-being of small farmers and the environment is the driver for his decades of service to the field of sustainable and organic agriculture.

Past Climate Leadership Award Winners:

2022

Farmer: Ellee Igoe, Solidarity Farm

Researcher: Tim Bowles, UC Berkeley

Agricultural Professional: Sacha Lozano, Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County

Policymaker: Assemblymember Robert Rivas

Special recognition: Jeanne Merrill, outgoing CalCAN Policy Director

2019

Farmer/Rancher: Ward and Rosie Burroughs, Burroughs Family Farm

Researcher: Tapan Pathak, UCCE Merced

Agricultural Professional: Ruth Dalquist-Willard, UCCE Fresno

Policymaker: Ken Alex, former Director of Governor Brown's Office of Planning & Research

Legislative Staff: Brett Williams, Legislative Director for Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin

2017

Farmer: Judith Redmond, Full Belly Farm

Researcher: Kerri Steenwerth, USDA ARS

Policymaker: Secretary Karen Ross



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2015

Farmer: Craig McNamara, Sierra Orchards

Researcher: Stephen Wheeler, UC Davis

Policymaker: Senator Lois Wolk

2013

Farmer: Russ Lester and Jenny Lester-Moffitt, Dixon Ridge Farms

Researcher: Valerie Eviner, UC Davis

2011

Farmer: Rich Rominger, Rominger Brothers Farm

Researcher: Louise Jackson, UC Davis