Environment (/topics/21692-environment)
News (/topics/71-news)
WEST (/topics/21707-west)

Advocates call climate-smart ag funding ‘woefully insufficient’

11/18/26 6:02 AM
By Pam Strayer (/authors/918-pam-strayer)
No Comments (https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/25513-advocates-call-climate-smart-ag-funding-woefully-insufficient#comments-container)
(http://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/25513-advocates-call-climate-smart-ag-funding-woefully-insufficient)
(https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/25513-advocates-call-climate-smart-ag-funding-woefully-insufficient&text=Advocates%20call%20climate-smart%20ag%20funding%20%E2%80%98woefully%20insufficient%E2%80%99)
(https://www.reddit.com/submit?url=https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/25513-advocates-call-climate-smart-ag-funding-woefully-insufficient)
(https://www.linkedin.com/sharing/share-offsite/?url=https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/25513-advocates-call-climate-smart-ag-funding-woefully-insufficient)
(/emails/send_to_friend/articles/25513)
(/articles/print/25513-advocates-call-climate-smart-ag-funding-woefully-insufficient)



From left: Paul Sousa, Colton Fagundes, Joaquin Contente and Lisandra Vitorino participate on a dairy panel at the 2026 CalCAN Conference. (Agri-Pulse photo/Pam Strayer)

As the COP31 proceedings were held half a globe away, more than 300 California farmers, ranchers, nonprofits staff and ag professionals gathered last week in Fresno for the annual California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN) conference, held for the first time in the Central Valley.

CalCAN's recommended actions for the next state administration are fourfold: strengthen farm resilience; support dairies to improve water quality and produce compost; protect farmland and the nation's healthy food supply; and provide funding for farmers as they transition to more resilient and regenerative ag systems.

The conference came as Gov. Gavin Newsom and other state officials were attending COP31, where the governor announced $81 million from a voter-approved bond for climate-smart agriculture projects.

As California Gov. Gavin Newsom was touting his state's climate-smart agriculture spending at the COP31 global gathering in Turkey, a statewide coalition of farmers and ag experts was complaining that funding for their efforts has been grossly insufficient.

As the COP31 proceedings were held half a globe away, more than 300 California farmers, ranchers, nonprofits staff and ag professionals gathered last week at the DoubleTree Convention Center in Fresno for the annual California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN) conference, held for the first time in the Central Valley.

The location marked a change from the conference's usual setting in Davis, the site for the 17-year-old group's previous annual meetings. The Fresno event, attracting more Central Valley farming producers and professionals, sold out.

But the agenda remained the same — to advance "practical, farmer-centered policy solutions" — as the group stated in its September policy recommendations overview, "Resilient Farms, Healthy Communities, and Lower Costs."

With the 2026 midterms over, the group is focused on providing guidance to the state's incoming administration. Governor-elect Xavier Becerra is expected to appoint a new California Department of Food and Agriculture secretary to replace Karen Ross, who has announced she is retiring after leading the agency since 2011.

CalCAN (https://calclimateag.org/)'s recommended actions for California's next administration are fourfold: strengthen farm resilience (while also improving air and water quality); support dairies to improve water quality and produce compost; protect farmland and the nation's healthy food supply; and provide funding for farmers as they transition to more resilient and regenerative ag systems.

In conference panel after conference panel, attendees voiced pain points. These surfaced in sessions on increasing restrictions on agricultural burning; new regulations on manure management, water quality, groundwater and methane; and limits on farm-generated nitrate pollution in groundwater.

Increasing pressures

Participants' comments also reflected the increasing pressures they are facing as regulations created to protect natural resource bases and ecosystems, along with diesel prices, stressed many businesses close to or beyond the breaking point.

Add to that uncertainty, a predicted, extra-strength El Niño, which one speaker characterized as a "Godzilla El Niño."

"Folks who work in agriculture, especially in the valley, are really feeling the pain of what's at stake," CalCAN Executive Director Renata Brillinger said. "They are feeling the consequences for their businesses, for their families, for their communities and for their ability to stay in farming."

Justin Wylie of Wylie Farms shared the impact of drought on his pistachio and citrus crops, saying, "This spring we had one of the hottest March temperatures on record … one of the worst possible. We were expecting a 1.2-billion-pound [pistachio] crop between New Mexico, Arizona and California. We ended up with about 675 million pounds. The last I checked, Arizona was close to zero. We have never experienced 95 degrees during bloom in March, and the trees just couldn't take it."

While global climate leaders coordinated their priorities, Brillinger said California needs to up the state's ante on spending to better support its own climate initiatives in ag.

"I think about how we will continue to meet our greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets," she told Agri-Pulse. "The funding that's been available to date to support agriculture in contributing to those targets has been insufficient and unreliable, and that makes it challenging for farmers to consider applying and carry out those practices."

Funding announced

Related Articles

House advances $1.7T Build Back Better bill, climate-smart ag funding (/articles/16837-house-passes-bbb-act)
Additional funding for climate smart ag presents new opportunities (/articles/16744-additionally-funding-for-climate-smart-ag-presents-new-opportunities)
Advocates call on Rio+20 participants to embrace sustainable ag (/articles/1995-advocates-call-on-rio-20-participants-to-embrace-sustainable-ag)

Their comments came as Newsom last week announced $81 million for climate-smart agriculture projects across 55 counties. His office says funding builds on state programs that are already cutting pollution and saving water through thousands of on-farm projects, and will help more farmers improve soil health and prepare for drought.

Funding for the projects comes from Proposition 4, the $10 billion climate bond approved by the state's voters in 2024. The bond includes $300 million for climate-smart agriculture, including $65 million to improve soil health and store more carbon in the ground, and $40 million for the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program, which helps farmers save water and energy.

COP31 — the 31st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change — is an annual global climate conference that brings together world leaders, scientists, businesses, nongovernmental organizations and others. This year's focus is on implementation.

California's delegation included Ross, Natural Resources Agency Secretary Wade Crowfoot and California Public Utilities Commission President John Reynolds. The conference opened Nov. 9 and ends Nov. 20.

"Voters approved Proposition 4 in 2024, which included funding for many important climate solutions, including for the first time some bond funding for powerful agricultural climate solutions," said Brillinger. "We are pleased to see Gov. Newsom's announcement that these funds will soon start being distributed to support farmers with soil health building, on-farm water conservation, and equipment sharing to carry out climate smart practices."

Nearly 8% of California greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, according to state and federal estimates, but legislators have not sufficiently supported proven programs that reduce those emissions, Brillinger said.

Transition programs that support and de-risk better practices farmers need have proven they succeed, she said. And once those transitions take place, there is a payoff when producers continue to use the more resilient practices without ongoing transition subsidies, she said.

Some of the most cost-effective ways that the government has invested in reducing emissions are in funding resilient practices on farms, Brillinger said, "but the dollars that have been allocated are really woefully insufficient compared to how many farmers apply and compared to what the sort of potential and the promise is. That disconnection is hard to understand.

"It will just continue to be something we need to raise up and point to and encourage both the governor and the Legislature to look at and understand, as well as to understand what's at stake," she added.

Ag Order 4 funding unavailable

As one example, Ag Order 4, a regulatory permit from the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, encouraged farmers to plant cover crops, a practice that is especially important in mitigating severe water events like an El Niño. But funding is no longer available.

Modibo Keita of Sustainable Conservation pointed to his group's efforts when Ag Order 4 encouraged cover crop adoption. He noted that in just a two-year window on the Central Coast, adoption increased from 5% cover crop planting to 15%. "The energy created through that was very inspiring. Credits and incentives are very powerful tools," he said. He lamented that funding for those credits is no longer available.

In addition, input prices are not expected to remain stable, as Wylie pointed out. "The inputs you have today ... will not be the same cost in five to 10 years," he said.

Looking ahead, Brilinger said, "Now that the electoral races have been decided, it's our hope and expectation that we will be able to start some conversations about how to build on prior progress here in California."

"It's collectively the responsibility of the Legislature, the governor and the agency folks to figure out how to ensure that this sector of our economy stays viable and continues to feed us and others around the state and the country," she said.

KEYWORDS CalCAN (/keywords/11078-calcan) california (/keywords/555-california) climate (/keywords/79-climate)