

State Legislative Summit
Sacramento Metro Chamber Food and Ag Committee
Food and Agricultural Issues for 2017

Farm to School – USDA funding for farm to school projects was given to 74 projects in 2016. Nearly \$5 million in grants were awarded to projects spanning 39 states. This is not much funding for the growing amount of demand for such programs. The USDA program has a very low rate of grant renewal, making sustainability difficult. Such projects often include new partners, new program design, and new evaluation tools. Providing longer-term and renewable funding sources ensures these programs can scale to reach greater numbers of students. Currently, only 4% of kids eat their daily recommended vegetables. As a result, kids in the state experience a 40% childhood obesity rate. More funding is needed to reach every child in California with tasting, cooking, nutrition and garden programs that partner with school cafeterias to provide a full cycle local food experience for kids who need it most.

Williamson Act and Farm Land Protection- It is important that we continue to support the Williamson Act which is the most important farm and ranch land protection program in the state. We need to seek the return of funding for the 50 or so counties who participate in the program. The state used to subvent \$37 million to the counties to help offset their foregone tax revenues. It is important that we find new sources of funds as well as incentivize counties to continue the program and to offer new contracts.

Drinking Water- There has been a great deal of attention paid to the contamination of drinking water wells in the state with much focus on nitrates, much of which has come from some agricultural sources. Much of the nitrate problem is a legacy issue and not all the nitrate present in groundwater comes from agriculture as there are sewer treatment and septic contributors as well. In addition, there are many contaminants other than nitrates throughout the state including arsenic, perchlorate, Chromium 6, Uranium and more that have contaminated groundwater. As such, what is needed is a comprehensive approach to providing safe drinking water to all California residents through a new broad-based funding program and existing bond monies. The entire burden for clean-up efforts and provision of drinking water should not be placed on agriculture. In cases where farmers and ranchers provide drinking water liability protections should be provided.

Research- If the recent drought has taught us anything it is that we need to devote more dollars to research. Water use efficiency, drought tolerance, salt tolerance, yield improvements are all areas needing funding for research and our UC system is ready and capable of doing so as long as funding is available. Agriculture will be seeking new funding mechanisms in the year ahead.

Pesticide Use Near Schools- The use of pesticides near schools and day care centers will continue to be a topic of discussion. There is no doubt that the existing regulatory framework is working and protective of sensitive populations. County agricultural commissioner's work with farmers and schools to ensure safety. New rules are unnecessary and costly. We should also focus on the siting of schools to avoid placing them in areas of intensive farming.