

# AGRARIAN ADVOCATE



GROWING FOOD, GROWING FARMS, GROWING COMMUNITIES



## Water Stewardship for Drought Preparedness

### STORY AND PHOTO

BY KENDALL LAMBERT, WATER PROGRAM COORDINATOR

As we are all very much aware, California is currently facing a historic drought which presents serious logistical and financial challenges for farmers and ranchers across the state. Farmers who irrigate their crops rely on surface and ground water supplies, and ranchers often rely entirely on precipitation to grow pasture for livestock. This year, farmers are faced with meager precipitation, limited or no access to surface water for irrigation, and declining groundwater levels that may impact their ability to substitute groundwater.

Fortunately, on-farm water stewardship and management practices that are often relatively easy to implement are available to help growers reduce water use and meet the challenges of the drought. By optimizing on-farm water use, growers can decrease dependency on the limited water supply while maintaining crop production. Many farmers already use these practices; however, depending on the farming operation, there may be new techniques that can be implemented. Some simple practices can include, but are not limited to:

*Water continued on page 4*

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COMMUNITY ALLIANCE  
WITH FAMILY FARMERS

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CAFF is a nonprofit organization that relies on membership dues and donations. Become a member or donate to CAFF online at [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org) or by mail.

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## OVERVIEW OF CAFF'S CURRENT WORK

Over 90% of California's farms and ranches are family-owned; however, many struggle to stay in business. To address this urgent issue, CAFF works directly with our members and growers throughout the state to increase the use of fresh, healthy, local food and to help growers prosper.

CAFF's programs focus on connecting farmers to new sales opportunities and providing them with the tools, resources and education they need to successfully run their farms. This increases their customer base and income, reduces their financial risk, and helps them become more sustainable (with both on-farm practices and as a business).

In addition, CAFF has been advocating for family farmers and sustainable agriculture in the California legislature for over 35 years. We continue that work today by focusing on urgent agricultural policy issues, including climate change, water usage, direct marketing regulations, and food safety. We focus on state and federal policies, defending the rights of family farmers, as well as educating growers about new policies that affect their farms.

CAFF is also the co-host of the California FoodCorps program in conjunction with Life Lab, overseeing 12 Americorps members placed in service sites within the state. By hosting this program and providing training to service members, CAFF helps to build the capacity of Farm to School programs statewide, increasing the amount of local produce that cafeterias are purchasing. CAFF also co-leads the California Farm to School Taskforce, a statewide network that serves as a communications hub for sharing resources, best practices, and cross-region strategies regarding Farm to School.

CAFF's work continues to connect family farmers to their communities in order to create and expand a thriving local food system. Our goal is to strengthen family farmers, who are the cornerstone of healthy and economically viable communities.



# Laguna Farm and CSA

**STORY BY RACHEL PETITT, FARM TO MARKET ASSISTANT**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF LAGUNA FARMS**

Many exciting and revolutionary activities are taking place on Laguna Farm's (Laguna) 25 acres in Sonoma County; co-owners Jennifer and Ignacio work to combat social justice issues as well as run a very successful Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Ignacio has twenty years of experience farming the land and skillfully manages the harvests, while working alongside his sons. In addition, Jennifer's background in social activism was a natural segue to sustainable, community-centered farming. You can visit their farm store or find them at farmers markets throughout Sonoma County ([lagunafarm.com](http://lagunafarm.com)).

Jennifer and Ignacio feed over 450 families through their CSA with the diverse crops grown on their farm. The CSA model allows consumers to become more familiar with farmers by sharing the harvest, visiting the farm, and learning about new varieties of local produce and recipes. With four growing seasons, Laguna's year-round CSA provides many opportunities for culinary discoveries. To help consumers explore local food, they assembled a useful glossary of identification, storage tips, and recipes. CSA members receive a weekly newsletter with updates about farm news, the fruits and vegetables in their box, and ideas for how to prepare the produce items.

The CSA model also emphasizes the relationship between farmer and consumer, and works to meet the needs of both. In a similar way, Laguna takes care of the needs of those who work on the farm, by employing workers full-time and year round. Laguna offers living wages, worker-owned crops, and a rewarding environment. To further their mission

of making fresh, local, produce more accessible, Laguna accepts CalFresh benefits as payment for CSA shares. The farm worked with CAFF to demonstrate the process of obtaining an EBT machine to other CSA farmers in the state.

Providing the larger community with an abundance of nutritious food is made possible by maintaining quality growing standards. To help with this issue, CAFF's food safety manager assisted Laguna in writing a food safety plan. In addition, Laguna does not use pesticides, practices water reduction, and builds soil health through compost and crop rotation. By distributing locally and directly to the consumer, Laguna's business model has cut down the amount of fuel used for transportation and enabled reusable packaging. Farming on the floodplain of the Laguna de Santa Rosa reminds Jennifer and Ignacio of their responsibility to protect waterways and conserve their water usage. They dry farm strawberries, potatoes, and tomatoes and use a grey water management system.

In addition to sustainable farming practices, the farm works to preserve the existing wildlife of the Laguna de Santa Rosa watershed. The wetlands neighboring the farm are the natural habitat to more than 200 species of birds, as well as salmon and the endangered California Tiger Salamander. Some of the native Valley Oak trees on the property boast over 100 years of age. To see the wildlife and meet the farmers, visit Laguna Farm on one of their First Thursday tours, May – October. For more information about Community Supported Agriculture or how to find a CSA near you, please visit [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org). 🌱

- Irrigation system maintenance: Regular inspections and upkeep improves the efficiency and uniformity of irrigation equipment and can eliminate leaks and reduce water use.
- Irrigation scheduling: Based on crop water needs, growers can use some combination of soil moisture monitoring, weather station information, and crop data as appropriate.
- Recycled water: Growers can use treated municipal wastewater, reuse agricultural runoff or tail water from irrigation events, or even use household grey water or roof runoff for small scale crop irrigation.

Currently, federal, state, and local agencies are providing financial assistance, technical support, and resources to help farmers adopt new on-farm water management practices, as well as maintain the economic viability of their farming operations. For the latest information on these assistance programs, visit the CAFF drought resources web page at <http://caff.org/programs/drought/>.

To support growers during the drought, CAFF is promoting on-farm water management techniques with funding from the California Department of Water Resources. The initial cornerstone of our program is targeted grower-to-grower workshops on water stewardship topics for wine grape growers (pictured in the cover photo).

This spring, CAFF partnered with regional wine grape organizations and experts such as the Napa Valley Grape Growers, the Vineyard Team in Paso Robles, the Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains, and UC Cooperative Extension to sponsor workshops in key wine growing regions. At these workshops, speakers presented information and

demonstrated how to use on-farm irrigation management techniques such as soil moisture monitoring devices, sap flow sensors, evapotranspiration equations, and plant water stress monitoring systems. These techniques allow growers to precisely determine when to irrigate and how much water to apply to reduce overwatering and optimize yields.

The program will continue this summer, as CAFF will facilitate additional workshops for wine grape growers on methods related to irrigation efficiency and dry-farming wine grapes during the drought. Please check [caff.org/news-and-events/workshops](http://caff.org/news-and-events/workshops) for the latest schedule.

CAFF is also developing resources for growers of all crop types regarding on-farm water stewardship practices. CAFF is the new manager of the California Agricultural Water Stewardship Initiative's online water resource center (<http://www.agwaterstewards.org>). Started in 2008, the website has grown to include 12 practice pages outlining details of on-farm water stewardship methods such as keyline design and soil management, 68 case studies explaining how California farmers are implementing these practices, and a technical resource library. This website is meant to provide information to help farmers with on-farm water management decisions and can be a valuable resource during the drought.

The current drought presents new and immediate challenges for CA farmers. For those in need of direct technical assistance for drought related issues, or before implementing any new on-farm practice, contact your local Farm Advisor, RCD, Natural Resource Conservation Service or other technical support entity.

*For additional information on this program, please contact Kendall Lambert, CAFF's Water Program Coordinator, at [kendall@caff.org](mailto:kendall@caff.org).* 🌱

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## CSA Collaboration in California

STORY BY RACHEL PETITT, FARM TO MARKET ASSISTANT

PHOTO COURTESY OF LOCKEWOOD ACRES

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is alive and well in California, and CAFF is proud to support the movement. CAFF recently partnered with URGENCI, a network of CSA farmers in France, to host the International CSA conference at EcoFarm in 2013. Over the course of the three-day conference, CAFF heard from representatives of more than twenty countries and learned about the successes of CSA across six continents. Learning about the experiences of international CSA networks inspired California farmers to collaborate and share ideas more often. With more than 250 farmers operating CSAs in California, there is ample opportunity for farmer-to-farmer collaboration!

This spring, the first steps were taken to form a state-wide group of CSA farmers. CAFF staff met with CSA farmers in the Sacramento area, Sonoma County, the San Joaquin Valley, and the Central Coast to discuss topics including an explanation of recent direct marketing policy, strategies for member acquisition and retention, accepting EBT as payment for shares, and how to collaborate with other CSAs. More than 70 farmers from around the state attended the meetings to share their ideas, ask questions, and offer suggestions. To learn more about this project, visit [caff.org/programs/csas/network/](http://caff.org/programs/csas/network/).

After collecting feedback, CAFF noticed one repeated suggestion by CSAs throughout the state: there is a need

for consumer education to emphasize the uniqueness of the CSA model. Becoming a member of a CSA is a unique way of supporting local farmers, which is different from patronizing a grocery store or visiting a farmers market stand. A CSA share is a season-long relationship between a farmer and a consumer. Members offer to “share the risk,” as Elizabeth Henderson, author of *Sharing the Harvest*, states, by committing to the harvest at planting time. With each CSA box, the consumer is invited to explore what their local food system has to offer. Often the boxes contain a newsletter with stories, pictures, recipes, and farm announcements.

CAFF’s CSA work allows California farmers to engage with the larger community of CSA operators, on a national and international level. Widening the scope of communication is especially crucial for beginning farmers, so they may glean advice from those with more experience. Participating in an international discussion about agriculture also creates many opportunities for discovery. With more than 20,000 CSA operations around the world, there is a diversity of perspectives in the conversation. CAFF will continue to support direct marketing farmers with policy work and outreach to further the success of CSAs in California. To find a CSA in your area, visit [caff.org/programs/local-food-systems/search-bfbl/](http://caff.org/programs/local-food-systems/search-bfbl/). 🌱



# CALIFORNIA FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

Regions and Regional Leads



## STORY BY HEATHER FRAMBACH, STATEWIDE COORDINATOR

In addition to our strong work supporting family farmers and food systems at the regional and community levels, CAFF is also strengthening its role as a leader in Farm to School at the statewide level.

For eight years, CAFF played a major role in the California Farm to School Taskforce, a group of thirty leaders around the state who provided coordination and leadership

around Farm to School programming through workshops, information sharing, policy advocacy, and networking.

Last summer, the Taskforce came together and decided to broaden their work; they transitioned to become the California Farm to School Network (CFSN), a collaborative organization open to all individuals who work on Farm to School programs and projects in California (see map above).

In a state that is very fortunate to have a year-round

# FoodCorps

growing season in many places, excellent soils, and plenty of progressive thinking about agriculture, it is incredibly important for our state to be organized and continue our strong leadership in the Farm to School movement. The primary goals of the network are to align Farm to School efforts, share resources, and bring farmers, schools, distributors, and practitioners together, to continue linking family farmers to K-12 school cafeterias for the health of our children, schools, and communities.

CAFF officially launched the CFSN in partnership with the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute in February of 2014. The network serves as a powerful convener of Farm to School leadership, activities, and communications for the entire state of California.

Please visit the California Farm to School Network's official website at [cafarmtoschool.org](http://cafarmtoschool.org) for more information. Visitors can read our blog, sign up for our mailing lists, see upcoming events and trainings, learn how to contact their regional leader, look for useful resources, and more. 🌱

In 2013, CAFF had the honor of being selected as the California Host Site for FoodCorps, in partnership with Life Lab. FoodCorps is a nonprofit national service organization that is rapidly gaining visibility and legitimacy in the world of food systems.

Working with host sites in each of the 15 states where FoodCorps is active, the organization uses an AmeriCorps public service program to provide service members to schools and nonprofits by installing or revitalizing school gardens and supporting Farm to School-related projects and programs.

FoodCorps has been operating for three years and entered their first year of expansion into California. As a result of our partnership, we have deployed 12 amazing and enthusiastic service members to ten service sites throughout the state for the 2013-14 program. We are in the process of selecting our next class of service members for the 2014-2015 year. *(Pictured below: CA FoodCorps service member, Noah Crosson, with two students).* 🌱



# Policy Update

BY DAVE RUNSTEN, POLICY DIRECTOR

Some of the current bills we are following in Sacramento:

## **AB 1871 (Dickinson) – Farmers Markets – CAFF supports**

This bill would raise the fee on farmers markets that goes to CDFA and the Ag Commissioners from \$0.60 on farmer stalls to \$2.00 on all stalls. It also would establish a self-certification that farmers follow the Good Agricultural Practices for food safety, increase penalties and crimes associated with fraudulent selling in the markets, and require posting of signs to this end, among other things.

## **AB 1990 (Gordon) – Urban Gardens – CAFF supports**

This bill comes from the Environmental Health officers. They are seeking to create uniform state rules for urban gardens (school gardens, community gardens, culinary gardens, backyard gardens, etc.) to deem them an “approved source” for direct sales to consumers and restaurants. It would not override any local laws that might limit such sales. Another bill, AB 2561 (Bradford), seeks to override local prohibitions on urban food production and sale. CAFF has not taken a position on that bill.

## **AB 2402 (Buchanan) – Weed management – CAFF supports**

The invasive weed management program in CDFA was eliminated under the Brown administration when there were large cuts in general fund money during the recession. Now that there is more funding, many groups are trying to restore a modest amount (around \$2.5 million). These weeds cause tremendous problems for farmers and ranchers and use millions of acre feet of water.

## **AB 2185 (Eggman) – Pollinator Habitat – CAFF supports**

This bill would ask that the overseers of public lands in California designate areas where bee keepers could take their bees to forage.



*Photograph by Kendall Lambert*

## **AB 1789 (Williams) – Neonicotinoids – CAFF supports**

This bill asks that DPR finish its studies of neonicotinoid pesticides by a specific date or report to the Legislature. These pesticides have been banned in some countries because they are implicated in the problems bees have.

## **SB 835 (Hill) – Antibiotics in animal agriculture – CAFF supports**

On December 11, 2013, the FDA released a new draft guidance that asks animal-drug makers to voluntarily discontinue marketing antibiotics to farmers for faster livestock growth (using them only for therapeutic purposes). It also would shift the sale of such antibiotics from over-the-counter to by-prescription from a veterinarian. This bill would make the FDA guidance California law. AB 1437 (Mullin) is a competing bill on the same subject that the CAFF board did not support as it sets up a parallel registration apparatus in California.

## **AB 1826 (Chesbro) and AB 1594 (Williams) – Organic waste rules – CAFF supports**

These two composting bills are the successors to a bill that failed last year. The Chesbro bill seeks to require composting of green waste (rather than putting it in a landfill) and the Williams bill removes incentives to cap dumps with green waste. If these two bills are passed, agriculture will have to use a lot more compost. 🌱

Want to stay current with CAFF's policy positions? Look for this button on our website to sign up for our e-newsletters and policy alerts on [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org).

e-newsletter sign up

## CAFF Food Safety Program Update

Although large-scale commercial farms have already implemented food safety practices, this is not the case for many small, organic, biodynamic, diversified, or direct-market farms. The results of a recent survey of such farms in California's North Coast region show that fewer than 20 percent had any experience with food safety issues and even fewer had written food safety plans. Since such a plan is increasingly a requirement for participation in commercial markets, these farms are at risk of being shut out of markets. CAFF's food safety program reaches out to the thousands of farmers who do not have the funds to hire private consultants, do not sell in markets that currently require food safety plans, and require one-on-one assistance to create customized, written, and auditable farm food safety plans.

With funding provided by the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, CAFF created a food safety program (January 2012 - present) in collaboration with project partners. A major project objective is to create written, farm-specific food safety plans for specialty crop growers in California.

To achieve this, CAFF's food safety project manager stays up-to-date with current information so that CAFF can convey food safety needs and requirements to growers. This information and feedback is then incorporated into future workshops and food safety plans.

Through this project, CAFF delivers workshops, develops resources online, and conducts mailings to notify farmers about CAFF's ability to help develop food safety plans. During the first two years of the project, CAFF helped to provide 30 food safety workshops for over 800 specialty crop growers around the state. The food safety manager then follows up with growers to visit their farm, conduct mock audits, and develop customized food safety plans.

In addition, CAFF informs farmers about descriptions of Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and encourages them to start a basic food safety program with documentation of their current practices. Online aides such as the website 'onfarmfoodsafety.org' and other resources are available for farmers through the CAFF website ([caff.org/programs/foodsafety](http://caff.org/programs/foodsafety)) and growers are welcome to contact the food safety manager for further one-on-one assistance.

During the project, CAFF reached out to thousands of direct market specialty crop farms in California about developing food safety plans. As a result, CAFF was able to assist over 100 specialty crop growers in developing farm-specific food safety plans during the past two years.

CAFF looks forward to continuing this project over the next two years and beyond. If you have any questions about the program, or would like to develop a food safety plan, please email [foodsafety@caff.org](mailto:foodsafety@caff.org). 🌱



Photograph by E. Christian Wisner

# Notes from CAFF's North Coast Chapter

By **WENDY KRUPNICK, CAFF NC CHAPTER**

Last year, the North Coast region saw the emergence of an amazing and encouraging new phenomenon in our local agricultural scene – a vibrant group of 50 to 80 young farmers enthusiastically gathering at regular monthly meetings! Soon our local staff and chapter members met Evan Wiig, the charismatic force behind the Farmers Guild, to begin collaborating.

The Farmers Guild began as a way for young farmers, often isolated on their farms and ranches, to both socialize and exchange information. Other regions of Northern California also began these gatherings, and there are now guilds in Sebastopol, Sonoma Valley, Mendocino, Yolo, Central Coast and the Sierras, with more forming. This expansion was enabled through the Guild's partnership with FarmsReach, an outstanding web-based resource service that gleans current information from many sources, including CAFF. For more information please visit <http://www.farmsreach.com/>.

We quickly identified a common interest in on-farm workshops and were inspired to “re-light” a former CAFF workshop program - the Lighthouse Farm Network -- to bring “farmers and other agricultural professionals together to share technical information about biologically-based farming practices.”

Our first event, planned by our chapter's Climate and Ag committee, was a conservation burn workshop held in February. It was co-hosted by the Sonoma BioChar Initiative and led by Peter Hirst, a biochar expert, who demonstrated how to build a burn pile in a way that minimizes pollution and creates a supply of biochar, a valuable soil amendment.

Our chapter also partnered in the first annual Guild Raising event, with members of all guilds convening at the Sebastopol Grange. Paul Bernier's home-made compost turner was the star



*April workshop in the North Coast*

of the Equipment Showcase, which we plan to expand next year.

Additionally, the workshop, "Drip Smart: Improving Irrigation Efficiency Using Economical Moisture Sensors and Controllers" was held in April at the Bernier Farm in the Alexander Valley, where a wide variety of vegetable and fruit crops thrive amid a sea of wine grapes. Participants listened to excellent presentations about monitoring soil moisture and conserving water. Upcoming workshops include "On-farm Vegetable Composting" in July, and "On-farm Composting at Vineyards" in early August.

Our chapter policy committee has also been working with the Sonoma County Planning Commission on ordinances that will ease regulations for on-farm processing of food and fiber, as well as expand on-farm sales of these products.

In addition, we collaborate with the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Management Plan, the Sonoma County Water Coalition, and the Sonoma County Food System Alliance for projects and workshops when applicable.

The chapter supports the very successful work of local CAFF staff. Our mutual support has resulted in a wide range of services fulfilling CAFF's mission in our region.

*Chapter meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month and all are welcome. Please contact Wendy Krupnick, the chapter Vice president, for more information; [wlk@sonic.net](mailto:wlk@sonic.net). 🌱*

# Buy Fresh Buy Local in the Santa Clara Valley

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**The Taste of Santa Clara Valley**  
**is September 14, 2014**

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Be sure to read a copy of CAFF's newly-released *Buy Fresh Buy Local Food Guide for the Santa Clara Valley*! This guide is the first edition to focus on Santa Clara and San Benito Counties. With comprehensive listings for regional farmers markets, CSAs, restaurants, grocers and more, the guide is an indispensable resource for consumers looking to find local food. Also available at [caff.org](http://caff.org).



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