

California Food and Farming Policy Update

Brought to you by Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Fall 2004

State Capitol Wrap-Up

CAFF Pushes Progressive Agenda

The 2003-04 legislative session closed on August 31, and CAFF separated itself from the farm lobby pack on a variety of progressive measures. First, CAFF sponsored, with the Natural Resources Defense Council, AB 2054, authored by Davis Assemblywoman Lois Wolk. AB 2054 allows the University of California to continue initiating BIFS (Biologically Integrated Farming Systems) projects at the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program until 2010. The previous sunset date was 2005. AB 2054 received bi-partisan legislative support and was signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger.

CAFF also was the only statewide farm organization to support four major bills where other farm organizations either opposed or took a walk:

AB 1468 (Kehoe) required the state Air Resources Board and California Energy Commission to take steps to reduce petroleum demand in California to not exceed 2004 demand levels. It also authorized the ARB and CEC to go further and implement measures to reduce CA petroleum demand by 2020 to 15% below 2003 levels. While other farm organizations expressed concern about short-term cost impacts on diesel, CAFF noted that diesel prices already are at record highs because of our over-reliance on petroleum and saw long-term opportunities for farmers in producing feedstock for bio-fuels. AB 1468 failed passage on the Senate Floor.

AB 2389 (Koretz) required that imported beef sold in California be labeled to identify the country of origin. Grocers and processors strongly oppose consumer labeling requirements, but CAFF believes they both help consumers and make it more difficult to undercut US producers with cheap foreign imports. AB 2389 failed passage in Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 1160 (Cedillo) established a process for undocumented workers to obtain a California driver's license and allows workers to use other forms of identification than a driver's license for identification purposes. Farm workers are among the most affected by their inability to drive to their work sites. CAFF supported this controversial measure based on the personal observations of many of CAFF's farmer members, who have witnessed the difficulty faced by their own workers and the disruption it causes to farm operations. SB 1160 was vetoed.

SB 391 (Flores) made pesticide applicators legally liable for covering the cost of immediate medical care for injuries or illnesses caused by exposure to pesticide drift. Farm organizations opposed, citing fears of increased liability costs. CAFF disagreed, concluding the bill could actually lower litigation costs, and supported SB 391 as a matter of fairness and social justice. SB 391 was signed into law.

CAFF Helps Farmers Meet New Water Quality Requirements

CAFF successfully spearheaded a large and diverse coalition of 26 agricultural, sustainable agriculture, environmental, and social justice organizations in 2004 to win

multi-year funding for grants to help farmers reduce their off-farm discharge into water. The effort succeeded in securing \$39.5 million in the state budget over the next three years for the Agricultural Water Quality Grant program. As originally proposed by the Legislature, funding was limited to \$9.5 million for one year only.

The Agriculture Water Quality Grant program is a new program at the State Water Resources Control Board designed to provide grants for on-farm projects to reduce or eliminate discharge of agricultural pollutants to surface water or groundwater. The SWRCB is expected to focus its grants on projects that will enhance compliance with the new conditional agricultural waiver program in the Central Valley. The funding is important because farmers are facing new requirements to reduce their discharge of pesticides and other pollutants into streams and rivers.

The state budget specifies that “grants shall be given to projects with the greatest potential to reduce pollutants and protect water quality and that use qualified impartial experts to document and verify results through water quality monitoring or other means.” Funding from the program can be used by farmers and their technical advisors to implement the kinds of projects CAFF has developed over the years, including Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems and the use of hedgerows and other measures that filter water runoff.

In addition to strong policy leadership at the state level, CAFF has been a leader for California on a number of issues at the federal level as well. CAFF has provided leadership in support of Country-of-Origin labeling, improvements in proposed trade agreements and a ban on packer ownership of cattle until seven days prior to slaughter. These issues have been highlighted in previous newsletters. Today, we are excited to share with you highlights of some recent federal activities CAFF has provided leadership.

CAFF COMMENTS ON PROPOSED FOOD STAMP NUTRITION EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) submitted comments to USDA expressing our opposition to the proposed Food Stamp Nutrition Education Framework. The proposed framework would have a profoundly negative effect on the direct benefits of the Farm-to-School program on children's nutrition, local economies and family farmers, the populations served by the program. The Farm-to-School program works to fight malnutrition and obesity by teaching children to eat fresh, local fruits and vegetables. CAFF expressed the importance of reaching food stamp recipients as well as low-income families eligible for food stamps. We stated that our programs, many funded through California Nutrition Network, would be severely crippled by the proposed framework.

CAFF PARTICIPATES IN SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO BLOCK A CHANGE IN FEDERAL LAW REQUIRING PUBLIC NOTIFICATION FOLLOWING THE RELEASE OF TOXIC CHEMICALS

CAFF joined with 32 other organizations urging the Senate Appropriations Committee to reject efforts being lead by Senator Craig (R-ID) to change current law related to the required reporting of releases of toxic chemicals. The proposed amendment would have changed the definition of "hazardous chemical" in the Emergency Planning and

Community Right to Know Act and the definition of "release" in the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation Liability Act. The effort by Senator Craig was stopped with the strong leadership of Senator Feinstein (D-CA) during the committee consideration of 2005 appropriations. There is clear evidence large Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO's) are linked to air emissions with detrimental public health and environmental impacts. CAFF appreciates the strong leadership of Senator Feinstein in protecting the interests of our communities and of family farmers.

CAFF CONTINUES WORKING TO MAKE CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM A BENEFIT TO CALIFORNIA FAMILY FARMERS

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) submitted comments on the interim Final Rule on the USDA Conservation Security Program (CSP). CAFF has urged that the program be made a nation-wide program without geographic restrictions to limit farmer enrollment. CAFF advocates that the CSP provide enhancement payments to farmers and ranchers who establish and maintain complex management systems and practices that provide a high level of environmental and natural resource benefit. CAFF proposed improvement in the cost-share payment for new practices by removing the 50% cost-share cap, and restoration of the 15% bonus for cost-share payments for beginning farmers and ranchers. CAFF called for restructuring of the new "per acre" cap on contract payments, urging adjustments per state as to current land values and rental rates. CAFF also urged that the rules be changed to allow farmers and ranchers to meet high soil and water quality criteria within a reasonable time after participating in the CSP, rather than being a requirement for eligibility to apply. The CSP program has the potential to be a very beneficial program for California family farmers and ranchers and our states natural resources. CAFF will continue our efforts to strengthen the program and seek adequate funding necessary for its full implementation.