

California Food and Farming Policy Update

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Winter 2005

Special Election Fallout

Off-year legislative recesses are usually a quiet time for state politics, but in 2005 the entire legislative year was dominated by the extracurricular activity surrounding the special election. For Governor Schwarzenegger the results proved to bear out the predictions of his critics: the special election was ill-advised and backfired mightily on the Governor.

Unlike other governors, who spend years climbing the ladder and learning their craft, Schwarzenegger's entire political maturation has occurred in the public spotlight of the Governor's office. It's been a fascinating show. The first act, featuring a charismatic outsider who ran against entrenched politicians and special interests, opened to rave reviews. But the decision to raise unprecedented amounts of special interest money in order to campaign against teachers, nurses, and firefighters will go down in political history as a blunder of the first order.

Ironically the deep partisan rancor generated by the special election may result in a more productive 2006. Whereas little of import was achieved in the Legislature in 2005, Schwarzenegger's post-election makeover has included much talk of cooperation with the Legislature, and he and legislative leaders are talking with one voice about big agenda items such as a bond measure to finance the rebuilding of California's deteriorating infrastructure. Schwarzenegger also recently hired Susan Kennedy, former state Democratic Party boss and senior adviser to former Governor Gray Davis, as his new chief of staff. What does it mean? Who knows. It's never been done before.

GMOs Post-Sonoma County

The Sonoma County initiative to place a moratorium on the use of agricultural genetically modified organisms in the county was defeated in November, leaving the future of such efforts in doubt. GMO proponents who have fought the county initiatives, may redouble their efforts to pass SB 1056 (Florez), which would prohibit local governments or voters from enacting local ordinances to restrict GMO use, but they also would draw considerable opposition from a broad range of interests who oppose restrictions on local authority. Meanwhile, AB 984 (Laird) which protects innocent farmers from GMO contamination, must be heard in the Assembly Agriculture by mid-January. CAFF and other organizations are working with Assemblyman Laird to determine how to amend his bill to get it out of committee.

Farm to School Redux

Despite the Governor's veto of AB 826 (Nava), which would have established a statewide Farm to School program to assist local schools, there is reason to be hopeful that a similar measure might be enacted in 2006. Discussions with Secretary of Agriculture A.G. Kawamura have been promising, the strong bi-partisan support in the Legislature was promising, and Assemblyman Pedro Nava has said he wants to try again

in 2006. CAFF and the California Food and Justice Coalition, co-sponsors of AB 826, are working together to decide how best to proceed.

Why Not Hemp?

CAFF members are aware of the many attributes of industrial hemp as an agricultural crop, and CAFF has supported legislation in the past to allow its production in California. This year CAFF is supporting AB 1147 (Leno), which will establish rules by which California farmers can grow and process hemp. A recent court ruling, which makes a bright-line distinction between synthetic THC and the minute amounts of naturally-occurring THC in the hemp plant, has strengthened the case for the legal production of hemp. AB 1147 is in Assembly Agriculture Committee and will be heard by mid-January. CAFF is on record in support of AB 1147 and will work for its passage.