

California Food and Farming Policy Update

Brought to you by Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Winter 2006

2006 Tally: the bills that became law

The Fall edition of Capitol Update described a number of bills CAFF tracked and lobbied during 2006, including three bills passed by the Legislature and awaiting Governor Schwarzenegger's signature or veto. The Governor signed the following CAFF-supported bills into law:

AB 32 (Nunez and Pavley): SIGNED INTO LAW - As he promised even before the legislative session ended in August, the Governor signed AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act, into law. As a result, California will reduce its emissions of global warming gases to 1990 levels by 2020, a reduction of about 25% over status quo projections. **CAFF was the only statewide agricultural organization to support AB 32**, recognizing that global warming is the pre-eminent environmental and economic challenge to our future and that sustainable agriculture can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

SB 1347 (Machado): SIGNED INTO LAW - As expected, the Governor signed SB 1347, which expands the ability of farmers to implement an Integrated On-Farm Drainage Management program on their farm. The bill allows multiple contiguous farms to build and use a single system, lowering costs and economic risks. IFDM reduces off-farm water quality impacts from salt and selenium and restores salt-degraded land and contaminated groundwater tables. CAFF sponsored the original IFDM bill in 2002 and strongly supported SB 1347.

AB 1147 (Leno): VETOED - Not surprisingly in an election year, the Governor vetoed AB 1147, which amends the existing legal definition of marijuana to exclude industrial hemp. AB 1147 rested on a recent federal appeals court case that found the federal definition of marijuana explicitly excludes non-psychoactive hemp. The Governor's veto message concluded the court decision clouded rather than clarified the status of industrial hemp and also cited concerns by some law enforcement agencies. CAFF supported the bill's market-expanding opportunities of hemp, which the Governor also cited even as he vetoed the bill.

Ag-Environ coalition working to develop sustainable certification program

The California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE) is a consortium of agricultural and environmental organizations as well as state and federal agencies that have voluntarily come together over the past several years to work on issues where they can find common ground for solutions. CRAE members have worked collaboratively to reform UC's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, a long-time project of CAFF's, and to strengthen conservation programs in the next Farm Bill.

Another key effort by CRAE is to develop a program to certify farms and/or specific crops for sustainability, both as a marketing tool for farmers and as a means of reducing regulatory burdens on farmers certified sustainable. CAFF is participating in a CRAE subgroup that is leading the effort. The group is working with two private organizations, Protected Harvest and the Food Alliance, that currently certify farms and crops that meet

a set of criteria for sustainability set by the organizations. We also have studied the programs of commodity groups, such as the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission, which have undertaken their own programs to certify farms, or at least establish a menu of options, for farmers.

The group has met with several state and federal regulatory agencies to report on our work and assess their level of interest in the approach. Uniformly, the agencies see certification of sustainable practices as a valuable approach that can give farmers established guidelines for practices that can reduce their environmental impacts as well as an opportunity to distinguish their products in the marketplace. Capitol Update will report on the progress of this CRAE project as it develops.

Meet the new Legislature, same as the old Legislature

In one sense, the November elections brought almost no change to the Legislature: out of 100 legislative seats up for election (all 80 Assembly seats and 20 of the 40 Senate seats), only one changed parties -- maybe.

In the election to fill an open seat in the 34th Senate district in Orange County, termed out Republican Assemblywoman Lynn Daucher got 13 more votes than former Democratic Assemblyman Lou Correa. If Daucher's advantage survives a re-count, the seat will shift from the Democrats to the Republicans, reducing the Dem majority in the Senate to 24-16. In the Assembly, every one of the 80 districts will stay in the hands of the same party, maintaining the 48-32 Democratic majority from the 05-06 session.

In another sense, a lot has changed. Thanks largely to term limits, 36, or almost half, of the Assembly members in the new legislative session will be freshmen. More than half of the Assembly Democratic caucus (25 out of 48) will be in their first term. And except for three termed-out Senators who were elected to an Assembly seat, all the new members will have no state legislative experience.

One of the many effects of term limits has been to widen the differences in the two houses. Since Assembly terms are only two years and all 80 seats are up for election, most new candidates first run for the Assembly. The fewer opportunities to win a four-year Senate term mean that they are usually sought and won by former Assembly members from the same area, who have established their name and record with the voters. As a result, the Senate has much more combined legislative experience than the Assembly.