



Connections

August 2010

Food & Ag Board Seeks Input on Ag Vision

In July, the California State Board of Food and Agriculture released draft recommendations on strategic policy options to support a sustainable food production and delivery system in California.

The complete list of Ag Vision recommendations, and history of the process, are available at: www.cdfa.ca.gov/agvision/

The Ag Vision recommendations consist of seven policy actions concerning regulatory administration, access to healthy food, invasive species, agricultural lands, stewardship, water security, and agricultural workforce. Public comments on the recommendations will be reviewed by an advisory committee assembled by American Farmland Trust and final list of recommendations will be presented to the state board this fall.

To submit comments, visit the Ag Vision website and complete the online surveys for specific recommendations. Comments on the Ag Vision recommendations will be accepted until August 20.

The draft recommendations are the result of a continuing process to bring together a variety of agricultural stakeholders and create consensus on the diverse set of issues impacting California's food system.



Ag Worker Transportation Program

In July, SACOG brought an agricultural worker vanpool program to the Sacramento region. CalVans offers agricultural workers in Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties safe, reliable and affordable vans to get to and from work sites. This project is funded through a \$2 million Caltrans grant.

Agricultural workers often do not have their own vehicle, and must rely on others who do own a car, but who may not have a driver's license and insurance, and who often charge significant fees, with an average cost of \$16 a day. The vanpool program helps get potentially dangerous drivers and vehicles off the road by offering good drivers with dependable vehicles and insurance, making our highways and rural roads safer for everyone.



CalVans requires that drivers have a valid driver's license, clean driving record, and good health. Drivers are responsible for organizing the vanpool and driving regularly, so they do not have to pay to use the van. Passengers must

be agricultural workers either living or working in one of the four counties, and must pay a weekly fee based on mileage.

The agricultural worker vanpool program started in 2000 in Kings County, and has grown across the state.

If you are interested in starting or joining a

vanpool, or learning more about the program, please contact Georgina Cardenas at (530) 668-0658.

Area Leads Nation in Farm-to-Consumer Sales

As the source of over 3.4 million tons of food annually, the Sacramento area is ripe for growth in the amount of that food consumed locally. Recently, a US Department of Agriculture study, supported by UC Davis Economist Shermain Hardesty, found that farmers sell their produce directly to consumers through farmers' markets and roadside produce stands at almost twice the national rate.

Hardesty looked at direct marketing, intermediated sales, and mainstream sales in El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento and Yolo counties.

Direct marketing resulted in an additional \$19,518 per farm in the Sacramento area, with a high of \$66,568 among Yolo County farms. Consistent with the findings of the RUCS local assessment, farmers take a

greater share of income the closer they can get to consumers in the supply chain.

The Sacramento-region study also found that fixed costs for compliance with regulations and business practices limit the potential size of local food supply chains, and that farmers' markets provide opportunities for growers to make

connections that will lead to other direct-marketing opportunities through outlets such as community-supported agriculture programs, restaurants, buying clubs and home-delivery businesses.

To read the full report, visit: www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR99. For more information contact Shermain Hardesty at UC Davis at sfpdirector@ucdavis.edu.



What's in Season

Below is a sample of fruits and vegetables currently in season.

Almonds
 Apricots
 Avocados
 Basil
 Beets
 Blackberries
 Blueberries
 Carrots
 Corn
 Cucumbers
 Eggplant
 Endive
 Fennel
 Figs
 Garlic
 Grapes
 Green, Wax & Romano Beans
 Greens (many varieties)
 Lettuce (many varieties)
 Melons
 Mushrooms
 Nectarines
 Okra
 Olallieberries
 Onions
 Peaches
 Pears
 Plums
 Pluots
 Radish
 Raspberries
 Rhubarb
 Strawberries
 Summer Squash
 Sweet peppers
 Tomatillos
 Tomatoes (heirloom & other varieties)
 Zucchini

To locate a California Certified farmers' market near you go to www.cafarmersmarkets.com.

To learn about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or to subscribe go to www.localharvest.org.

Project Information

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Stay current on rural-urban issues at www.sacog.org/rucs

FarmLink Gets Farmers on Solid Ground

FarmLink is one of many innovations highlighted in the Local Market Assessment. Read about other innovations at www.sacog.org/rucs.

California agricultural land is being converted to non-farm uses at ever increasing rates. American Farmland Trust reports that over 40,000 acres of land in California are being developed every year. At this rate, California will lose another 1.2 million acres of farmland by 2050. Meanwhile, our state's agriculture is going from green to gray: California farmers (principal operators) of age 65 and over outnumber farmers under 35 years old by about 9 to 1! "... We need to be focused on new strategies for how we might be able to get beginning farmers, young farmers into the farming business," said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in a recent speech.



A Woodland landowner signs a lease with a partnership of vegetable growers for the 2010 season.

Retiring farmers often lack information about ways they can keep land in agricultural production while simultaneously meeting financial goals for retirement and the fate of their land. Aspiring farmers face numerous obstacles to achieving their dreams, such as business planning skills, adequate financing, and not least, access to affordable farmland. "Today's beginning farmers face competition for land from developers, retirees seeking country retreats, and large established agricultural businesses," says Steve Schwartz, California FarmLink executive director.

A statewide non-profit organization, California FarmLink was founded in 1998 with the mission of building family farming and ranching, and keeping the state's precious farmland in agriculture. FarmLink works to link beginning farmers with retiring farmers and landowners by introducing aspiring farmers to landowners and helping facilitate lease, purchase and other tenure agreements. The organization operates an innovative loan program for farmers not always served by traditional lenders, and founded the nation's first agricultural Individual Development

Account (matched-savings) program—a model that was incorporated into the 2008 Farm Bill. FarmLink also regularly hosts workshops and offers one-on-one training to facilitate inter-generational transfers, and to assist new farmers with the business and financing resources they need to build viable, sustainable farms.

Within the greater northern valley region, there are 234 new and aspiring farmers looking for land and business opportunities to become successful entrepreneurs. Whether a family of Laotian strawberry growers looking for 30 acres in Sacramento County, a middle-aged couple hoping to expand their vegetable production on a few acres in El Dorado County, or a third generation African American rancher beginning his own operation on 100 acres in Yolo County, California FarmLink is available to assist. Currently, California FarmLink lists 32 agricultural land opportunities in SACOG counties for lease or sale, ranging from three to 150 acres.

For more information about FarmLink, visit: www.californiafarmlink.org



Forestry Update

SACOG is working with TSS consultants to address the topic of forest management as part of the RUCS project. The region has approximately 1.18 million acres of forested land—about 28 percent of the entire SACOG region. Management and conditions of these lands has changed significantly since settlement occurred during the Gold Rush. A current conditions report reflecting feedback from a number of stakeholders is now available at www.sacog.org/RUCS.

The report discusses 11 issues related to forest management including wildfires, timber production, water supply, habitat, recreation and climate change; as well as opportunities in energy production and carbon sequestration. These issues are interrelated and complex; therefore, forest management stands alone as one of five RUCS topic areas. The upside of this complexity is that innovations to address challenges and opportunities can affect multiple topics at the same time.

For more information contact David Shabazian at dshabazian@sacog.org.