



A Food and Agriculture Platform for the next U.S. Senator in California

Introduction: A Time of Great Opportunity for California's Food and Agriculture Sector

The election of a new California Senator represents a tremendous opportunity for food and agriculture, for the Golden State and the nation. At this crucial time when Americans are increasingly interested in the source of their food, we need a Senator who can promote transparency and connections between producer and consumer. As the food industry is changing in response to these interests and altered demographics, we need a Senator who recognizes California's leading role in farming, food business, and consumer trends. At this time when the farming sector is undergoing economic, environmental and workforce transformation, we need a Senator who can lead the way towards sustainability and health for rural families, communities, and farmers. The Berkeley Food Institute at UC Berkeley encourages the new Senator to support the following nine policy strategies -- which are backed by strong citizen engagement, and will benefit California and the nation.

1) Support Specialty Crop Growers, Large and Small

Fruits, vegetables, nuts, flowers and trees have always been central to California's agriculture, and together with ranching, brought in \$46.4 billion to the state economy¹ or 17.3 percent of the nation's agricultural output². Demand for fruits and vegetables continues to grow, while export and institutional demand for U.S. specialty crop products exceeds supply in many regions. California produces half the country's "specialty crops," yet these products and growers remain marginalized in a host of federal farming programs under the Farm Bill.

California's U.S. Senators should take a leading role in advancing specialty crops, particularly those that are produced sustainably. This can follow the role increasingly played by Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). For example, Senator Stabenow, as Chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, championed the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives provision in the 2014 Farm Bill, which lowers the price point of specialty crops for low-income shoppers. These funds have [directly supported California farmers, consumers, and community organizations](#).

Specialty crop growers of different sizes have different needs, and all contribute important parts of building our regional and national food security, and many of them contribute to the diversity and sustainability of agriculture. Without a doubt, Americans need to eat more fruits and vegetables, and as Federal support increases for specialty crops, the prices of fruits and vegetables and related products will become more affordable vis-à-vis more processed and nutrient-poor foodstuffs. Finally, horticultural products and other smaller yet still important specialty crop industries play an important role in California's diverse agricultural economy.

In-state:

- Support California Department of Food and Agriculture, University of California and other state entities that apply for USDA Specialty Crop Block Grants, a long-running and successful program to promote sustainable production of specialty crops.³

- Adopt the cause of California Thursdays and use his or her position to raise the profile of this program by visiting school sites, eating meals with children, and highlighting the economic impact on farms that participate in this program. California Thursdays was established in 2013 by the [Center for Ecoliteracy](#) and partners statewide to give schools statewide a day of the week to promote California-grown products with special recipes, farmer visits, nutrition lessons, and other activities to highlight our state's agricultural industry, and particularly, the value of fruits and vegetables that are critical for a healthy diet.

Federal:

- Advocate for the expansion of the USDA's Farm Service Agency Noninsured Assistance Program (FSA-NAP), one of the few federal farm insurance programs in existence for specialty crop growers.
- Lead Senate participation in the reinvigorated Specialty Crop Caucus, led by Rep. Costa (D-CA). Through this and other alliances with other top specialty crop states, advocate for deeper reforms in the next Farm Bill to continue to build the specialty crop industry in all 50 states. Specialty crop growers continue to be left out of a range of insurance products and sources of support, which places California farmers at a disadvantage and distorts pricing in our food supply to disadvantage fruits and vegetables.

2) Drive Sustainable and Profitable Food Systems Through 21st Century Procurement

One of the most promising national efforts to improve children's health and to reconnect sustainable farmers with consumers has been the Farm to School movement. School food service administrators are assisted to overcome purchasing barriers for locally produced farm products for school meals. This often means fruits and vegetables, and also dairy, meat, grains, and even seafood and wild game have been purchased through Farm to School programs. These programs often support farmers using sustainable and organic practices, which contribute important economic and environmental benefits. The 2014 Farm Bill supported Farm to School with \$5 million, and the Farm to School Act of 2015 is now being proposed as a bipartisan marker bill to accompany Child Nutrition Reauthorization to increase funding to \$15 million. California has been a leader in this movement, with a well-organized statewide Farm to School Network, convened by the [Community Alliance with Family Farmers](#), based in Davis.

In-State:

- Ensure that California is receiving maximum value from the Unprocessed Fruit and Vegetable Pilot, an innovation of the 2014 Farm Bill that has had a slow start in many states including our own.

Federal:

- Lead and support Farm to School initiatives in future Farm Bills and Child Nutrition Authorizations.
- Educate other members on the Good Food Purchasing Policy, created by the [Los Angeles Food Policy Council](#), which is an innovative procurement strategy for the public and private sectors that is now gaining nationwide attention.

3) Fully Implement the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act

The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 was one of the most significant victories for children's health and nutritious food in the history of American food policy. Aligning school breakfast and lunch programs with proven science in the fields of nutrition, dietetics and public health has proven popular in California and across the nation. Implementation of the Act has also increased consumption of fruits and vegetables among participating schoolchildren.⁴ While the Child Nutrition Act has not been reauthorized as of June 2016, California's Senator should declare his or her support for maintaining the nutritional

improvements to HHFKA programs and for California's continued leadership nationally in implementation of essential nutrition programs for children, seniors, infants, pregnant women and others covered by HHFKA. School districts like [Oakland Unified](#) and others throughout California are making tremendous strides in implementation of the HHFKA, providing nutritious meals under difficult budgetary limitations. They should be held up as examples of the success of the act and its potential for increasing good food access, particularly for low-income children and families.

In-State:

- Work with the Governor and the California Department of Education to remove any administrative roadblocks to full implementation of the 2016 Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR).

Federal:

- Promote the inclusion of California-grown commodities in federal procurement for CNR programs.
- Increase the federal reimbursement rates for meals offered through the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch, Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program.

4) Support Technology Improvements and Fresh Food Access for SNAP, WIC and Other Nutrition Assistance Programs

California remains shamefully at the bottom of the nation in participation rates for persons eligible for SNAP benefits. We must change this dismal ranking, given that California has the highest poverty rate in the Union, between 23 and 31 percent,^{5, 6} and also persistently high food insecurity rates. It is also in the best interest of California's economy to draw down these federal dollars, given that programs like SNAP show that every \$1 spent results in \$1.79 in local economic activity⁷. Many experts have pointed out that technology is outdated in both the SNAP and WIC programs, making it more difficult for eligible Californians to receive desperately needed benefits. WIC is still administered with paper checks in California and is not scheduled for transition to Electronic Benefit Transfers (EBT) until the deadline of 2020. With proper funding for implementation and guidance from stakeholders (including program clients), the technology expertise of Silicon Valley can and should help transform these programs for the state and the nation. The [Alliance to Transform CalFresh](#) is taking a leading role in convening stakeholders and policymakers to execute these improvements.

In-state:

- Cooperate with state agencies under existing regulations to maximize contracting opportunities for technology vendors that can increase efficiencies in the program, ensuring that contractors are chosen in open bidding processes and under parameters aimed at maximizing efficiencies and increasing participation among eligible Californians.
- Expand funding for market match programs that subsidize fruit and vegetable purchases for SNAP clients, expanding access to fresh produce that is vital for health and wellness and prevention of disease.

Federal:

- Work with technology stakeholders to make sure that technology solutions are advanced that improve access to SNAP and WIC, reduce administrative burdens and guard against fraud at all levels.
- Support California's legislative and administrative efforts to pursue dual-enrollment or single-application strategies given overlapping eligibility requirements across multiple federal programs.

5) **Assert Agriculture's Leadership Role in Combating Climate Change**

California farmers and ranchers are in a unique position nationally to innovate and demonstrate best practices on the farm that increase the resiliency of our food system in light of climate change. The availability of cap-and-trade funds (via AB 32, Statutes of 2006) provide the economic willpower for 21st century soil health and drought initiatives in California, including the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, State Water Enhancement and Efficiency Program (SWEEP) and the CDFA Healthy Soils Program. Evidence shows that agriculture is second only to the energy sector as a greenhouse gas contributor, and is also an industry very well-suited for mitigation and adaptation.^{8,9,10,11,12,13} Agriculture also has prospects of enhancing carbon sequestration and thereby mitigating climate change, through practices that build and sustain healthy soils.¹⁴ Thus, the state needs to support the adoption of sustainable and conservation practices for soil health in agriculture.

In-state:

- The California Senator should continue to support legislation that builds upon our landmark cap and trade laws, such as [SB 32](#) and [AB 197](#), which were recently funded through [AB 1613](#) and [SB 859](#). [California Climate & Agriculture Network \(CalCAN\)](#) is a trusted partner in research and legislative language related to the climate benefits of sustainable agriculture.

Federal:

- Encourage other states in the Northwest and Southwest regions of the US to also create greenhouse gas cap-and-trade markets, which would support the growing green economy as a region and increase the competitiveness of California's agricultural sectors (among others).

6) **Expand Organic Acreage**

The California organic industry is a notable leader in the state's agricultural economy and in the nation, and provides important export income for the state. California has also led the way in innovation in reducing environmental impacts of agriculture, using techniques that are now copied worldwide. Demand is at an all-time high for organic crops, yet farmers seeking to transition to organic certification still face challenges and hurdles. Certain organic crops are desperately needed by both consumers and industry, and California can do more to both support existing organic farms and encourage growth of the organic industry nationwide and internationally.

In State:

- Support the California Organic Food and Farming Act (COFFA) AB 1826, introduced by Assemblyman Mark Stone and the [California Certified Organic Farmers](#) in 2016. The bill aims to eliminate duplicative fees and paperwork for California organic farmers, which disproportionately impact small-scale and highly diversified farms.

Federal:

- Reallocating Farm Bill resources to alleviate risks associated with organic transition. While the U.S. demand for organic products has increased in recent years, a majority of this need has been met with supply imported from other countries. To avoid trade imbalances, the U.S. must invest in expanded domestic organic acreage.
- Consider measures to acknowledge and support the three-year transition period for organic farmers, which can be prohibitively expensive and highly risky. Farmers need support for research and extension on issues including pest control, organic and agroecological soil amendments, labor practices, marketing and continued compliance with National Organic Program regulations.

7) Prioritize California Universities for Agriculture & Nutrition Research

American farmers and ranchers, and other food producers, have always partnered with government agencies for research, product development and extension services. The need for research and extension is no more crucial than now, as our farming system is changing rapidly and our nutrition and food problems are pressing. Yet funding for agriculture and nutrition research has fallen in recent years, and research programs are often forced to seek private funds and/or discontinue programs. The University of California is a prominent land grant institution, with three campuses receiving federal land grant formula funding (Berkeley, Davis and Riverside) and field stations throughout the state conducting cutting-edge research into problems in food and farming. These universities also have significant institute and centers, such as the [Berkeley Food Institute](#) at UC Berkeley, which offers excellent evidence-based information that can inform policy-making. The state is also home to many other universities and colleges including the Cal State universities (including Cal Poly, Fresno, and Chico) that are doing excellent work in this field. We need to build upon the long legacy of research, extension and education and continue to develop solutions for the nation, in partnership with farmers and consumers, via our higher education institutions.

In-State:

- Coordinate with UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and other public agriculture and nutrition research institutions to receive cutting-edge research results and share them with constituents and colleagues.

Federal:

- Advocate for increased funding for [Cooperative Extension](#), formally established by the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 but rooted in agricultural clubs and societies of the early 1800s. As skilled extension agents are aging out of the workforce, our agricultural industry and communities in need cannot afford to lose those skilled California professionals.

8) Increase Incentives & Support for Farmers and Ranchers in the Margins

Recent Farm Bills have authorized funding for programs like the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (also known as the Section 2501 program), largely in response to a history of racial and gender discrimination in the delivery of USDA programs and services.¹⁵ Since the 2014 Farm Bill, 2501 programs have been undercut through the appropriations process, with today's negotiations a far cry from the direct funding of almost \$20 million annually from 2009-12. The 2501 program, along with other Farm Bill programs, supports a more diversified and resilient food system that better reflects the demographic shift that has already happened in California, and where the nation will soon follow.

In-State:

- California is piloting innovation in how guaranteed funding mechanisms can be modified to better meet the needs of the present and future. The Legislature and California's agricultural and food industry should be encouraged to pursue more equitable funding strategies like the Local Control Funding Formula in K-12 education.

Federal:

- Given the consolidation occurring in multiple sectors of the food system, more Farm Bill resources should be reallocated to support small- and mid-sized farmers and ranchers and food businesses. Large industries already benefit from economies of scale and a host of federal programs, which stands to threaten free market competition in the food and agriculture sectors.
- Monitor implementation of 2501 programs to ensure they reach the farmers and ranchers who most need them, throughout California and the nation.

9) Lead Congressional Colleagues in Equitable Immigration Reform

Both of California's Senators should go above and beyond to support administrative actions like President Obama's executive order to expand the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and create (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans) DAPA. This nation was borne of immigrants and the economy will continue to be strengthened by them. California has an estimated 2.67 undocumented immigrants¹⁶, many of whom work in the food system, and many of whom the agricultural industry relies on solely. The state's economy can be even more vibrant when our workers and their families can participate fully in their state and federal civic duties.

Federal:

- California's agricultural sector and food system as a whole would benefit from the creation of common sense guest worker programs that learn from programs of the past (e.g. bracero program) and the present (e.g. H2A and H2B visas).

In summary, your leadership and commitment regarding the above strategies will significantly benefit California's economy and society, and are important to the future of the state and nation. We also would like to offer the expertise and services of the [Berkeley Food Institute](#) at UC Berkeley, if you have any questions or needs related to this platform or other issues in agriculture and food systems.

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¹³ Altieri MA et al. (2015). Agroecology and the design of climate change-resilient farming systems. Agron. Sustain. Dev.; DOI 10.1007/s13593-015-0285-2

¹⁴ Merrill J & Kotin A. (2015). Growing Solutions: Climate Change and Agriculture Recommendations to the California Governor. CalCAN: Sacramento, CA. Retrieved from <http://calclimateag.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Growing-Solutions-Full-Report.pdf>

¹⁵ For the current status of racial and gender discrimination claims against the USDA, please see the Settlements and Claims website of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights: <http://www.outreach.usda.gov/settlements.htm>

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