



New Farm Bureau policies address problems, issues

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Issues that impact day-to-day farming and the long-range vitality of agriculture topped the agenda in the California Farm Bureau Federation's House of Delegates. The voting session was held last week during CFBF's 88th Annual Meeting in Anaheim.

Delegates debated and voted on a number of critical policy recommendations that will guide future actions of Farm Bureau leadership and staff.

"There were many important and complex issues our delegates thought out during their voting session," said Paul Wenger, CFBF first vice president, who presided over the sessions. "Remember that these issues were initially developed by our member counties and CFBF's standing committees in advance of the meeting.

"Throughout the year hundreds of Farm Bureau members at the grass-roots level have had input into these policy recommendations," said Wenger, who is a Stanislaus County walnut grower. "Consideration of policy changes and recommendations to our board of directors is an ongoing process within Farm Bureau, culminating each year in decisions by the House of Delegates, but it is a highly collaborative process."

One of the big changes delegates supported relates to marketing orders, which was proposed by Monterey County Farm Bureau and prompted by the E. coli issue, Wenger said.

"In the past Farm Bureau's policy has been to support growers' rights to assess themselves through marketing orders, but as an organization we didn't take a position on those orders.

"What's significant now is that the House of Delegates has said Farm Bureau needs to be involved when marketing orders deal with food safety issues. That's an important change."

Wenger said a recent poll of CFBF members found that after water availability, the issue most important to members is the inheritance tax. Because of that, he said CFBF President Doug Mosebar has pulled together a statewide committee of Farm Bureau leaders to work on ways to get equitable estate tax reform enacted by Congress before the current law sunsets in 2010.

In 2011 the old law goes back into effect, which would have devastating ramifications for California farmers and ranchers.

"It's interesting to note that the federal government has attempted to keep farmland in production by using taxpayer dollars to pay for conservation easements," Wenger said. "What we need to tell Congress is to keep farmers on the farm and land in agriculture, not tax it

out from under us when it's time to pass the farm to the next generation."

Among the other pressing issues coming before Farm Bureau's governing house were several relating to power generation and air quality, including the need for net metering for farms as more dairies are putting in methane digesters that will enable them to generate excess power and reduce greenhouse gases.

Related to that is the need for an emissions credit trading system, as well as a way to provide financial incentives to encourage installation of solar and other on-farm alternative electricity generating systems.

CFBF Environmental Affairs Director Cynthia Cory said, "There had been a lot of discussion throughout the year regarding emissions trading and renewable energy so it passed with no further discussion at the House of Delegates. I believe California growers are fully aware of the importance these topics bear on their future viability."

Cory said one of the key tasks in bringing the emissions credit trading proposal to the House of Delegates was pulling together scattered pieces of policy that touched on renewable energy in the CFBF policy book. That effort resulted in one clear policy that will help guide Farm Bureau in an area that is exploding in new directions.

The new policy on emissions trading calls for an infrastructure and ongoing research to insure that an effective and uniform environmental trading program is developed. This new policy gains added importance with passage of Assembly Bill 32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

The act, which caps greenhouse gas emissions from stationary sources, will be implemented during the next few years. Cory said it's important that stakeholders, such as Farm Bureau members, have clear policies on these issues and a place at the table during discussions about implementation.

"We continue to be asked about our position on renewable energy, bio-fuels, emission credits trading, net metering, and so on," Cory said. "There's so much going on in this area right now that we need to have sound policies in place and figure out the best role for California agriculture and our members."

One of the more fundamental changes to CFBF policy came as a result of a proposal that originated in the Horticulture Commodity Advisory Committee, of which Fallbrook nursery operator Janet Kister is a member.

"Nursery crops and floral products are the state's second largest agricultural sector, with nearly \$3.7 billion in production last year, putting us just behind milk and cream in overall statewide value," Kister said. "Our committee felt it was necessary to reflect this fact in CFBF policy.

"Because we're seeing more and more pest related issues, quarantines, shipping restrictions, added regulations we felt it was important to make sure that Farm Bureau policies recognize horticulture's contribution and include these issues in the work it's doing."

The amendment approved by the House of Delegates to Policy 3 will now read that the goal of Farm Bureau is to: "Ensure our ability to feed, clothe, shelter and enhance the quality of life through agriculture."

Kister said it is critical that the role the state's enormous horticulture sector plays in providing both economic and social benefits for all Californians be acknowledged. This recognition will become more important as the state and horticulture producers grapple with increasing introductions of non-native pests and diseases.

Other recommended policy changes and additions adopted by the House of Delegates include:

CFBF Policy 9: Addition of language supporting research funding that supports shift in acreage from upland to pima cotton.

CFBF Policy 26: Urges funding for productivity improvement and technological research to ensure all California commodities remain competitive. Encourages the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop and fund such programs.

CFBF Policy 57: Supports establishing a compensation program for producers who incur costs and losses due to a quarantine that requires them to destroy or otherwise dispose of plants, plant material or animals due to pests or disease after following established government protocols.

California actions affecting national matters will be advanced to the American Farm Bureau Federation national annual meeting in January in Salt Lake City.

AFBF Policy 48: Recommends amending policy on risk management/crop insurance to adding a provision encouraging expansion of revenue insurance products, including apiary and livestock products.

AFBF Policy 72: Under capital gains tax, CFBF delegates recommend an exclusion for land, improvements, products and conservation easements that are sold to pay estate taxes.

AFBF Policy 78: Because the Peru Trade Promotion Agreement includes a payment mechanism for Peruvian sugar producers in lieu of importing their sugar to the United States, CFBF delegates voted to recommend that international trade agreements preferably should not provide financial compensation to foreign producers in lieu of market access.

AFBF 115: CFBF delegates voted to add to American Farm Bureau's Federal Lands policy to stress that forest counties, which have suffered because of constraints on logging and timber processing, should continue to receive school and road federal funding guaranteed by the revenue sharing mechanism of the National Forest System.

A complete listing of all changes to CFBF policy will be included in an upcoming issue of Ag Alert®.

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