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California Agriculture's Climate Benefits Debated

Farmers, scientists & legislators gather to discuss Senator Wolk's bill to provide resources for agricultural solutions to climate change

Winters, CA — A group of farmers and ranchers, University of California researchers and farming advocates met with Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis) today to discuss her recently introduced bill, SB 1241.

The Agriculture Climate Benefits Act designates that a portion of funds generated from state or federal climate change programs support voluntary greenhouse gas emission reductions and carbon sequestration in California agriculture, while achieving environmental co-benefits such as improved air and water quality.

California agriculture is uniquely vulnerable to climate change. In a state where water is already scarce, climate change scenarios predict that water supplies will become increasingly constrained. Warming temperatures also threaten to shift the kinds of crops that can be grown in the state. These and other predicted climate changes could severely strain important agricultural industries. However, California agriculture is also positioned to assist in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering atmospheric carbon.

"Agriculture can play an important role in California's climate solutions toolkit," said Senator Wolk. "The Agriculture Climate Benefits Act will provide some of the resources needed for research, technical assistance and farming practices that benefit the climate and our farmers."

Research funded by the California Energy Commission suggests that some agricultural practices can help sequester carbon in the soil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-friendly agricultural practices can help the state meet its greenhouse gas emission reductions targets.

"Our research is showing that carbon sequestration can be achieved by combining farming practices such as cover cropping, applying manure and conservation tillage," reported Dr. Johan Six, Department of Plant Sciences, UC Davis. "But because of the great diversity of crops and farming systems in California, we need additional research to understand what real opportunities there are in California agriculture to effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

"With incentives like those proposed in SB 1241, more farmers will be able to transition to farming practices that offer climate solutions and have other benefits like improved air and water quality and water conservation," said Craig McNamara, owner of Sierra Orchards and founder of the Center for Land-Based Learning. "It's a win-win-win situation for all Californians."

The group convened at the Farm on Putah Creek, which is the home base and educational farm for the innovative non-profit, Center for Land-Based Learning (CLBL). The mission of CLBL is to inspire and motivate people of all ages, especially youth, to promote a healthy interplay between agriculture, nature, and society through their actions and as leaders in their communities. For more information about all of CLBL's statewide education activities, see <http://www.landbasedlearning.org>

For more information on SB 1241 and background on the issue of climate change and agriculture, please go to the website of the sponsors of the bill, the Agriculture and Climate Coalition, at http://www.calclimateag.org/sb1241_index.html.