



# CCOF

Organic Certification Trade Association Education & Outreach Political Advocacy



July 8, 2008

State Board of Food and Agriculture  
Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture

Dear Secretary Kawamura and members of the State Board:

CCOF -- California Certified Organic Farmers -- is pleased to submit our formal comments in response to your request for input on an AG VISION process.

CCOF has a tradition of visioning for the future. As far back as our first annual meeting, in January 1974, CCOF's members asked "What are we doing? Where are we going?" CCOF is proud to continue that tradition of visioning by submitting these comments to you. We thank you for this opportunity.

Our long tradition of envisioning an unconventional agriculture system was articulated at our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, in 1994, by one of our founding members when he talked about the social movement that was the "catalyst for the forces that converged into a socially conscious, moral movement concerned with the health of the planet and its creatures. The movement rejected the theology that placed humans above nature. The concept of ecology was born with it, the environmental movement and the organic food and farming movement."<sup>1</sup>

Along with this vision for organic farming came tension between the new, radical system, and the old, conventional system. Although CCOF now represents more than 1800 certified members, 250 supporting members, and more than half a million certified acres, we continue to experience a natural tension between those of us who want to pursue an agriculture system that keeps adapting to meet the needs of the environment, producers and handlers, and communities, and those of us who want to simply improve the status quo.

As CCOF began exploring the questions posed by the AG VISION process, we realized that your AG VISION process will elicit two basic approaches to a California agriculture system in the year 2030. One approach will recommend turning the existing system on its head once again and pursue a system that consumes less energy while feeding California, most of the nation and some of the world. The other approach will suggest improving on today's status quo by finding additional fossil fuel energy sources, by accelerating what we do today to accommodate the inevitable population growth of 2030. Everyone involved in this vision process might agree that changes in land use are essential for maintaining an agricultural sector in California in the year 2030, but that after that, these two different philosophies will distinguish CCOF's point of view from many others.

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<sup>1</sup> CCOF History 1973-1979; Farmers Know Best, by Keith L. Proctor, CCOF Magazine, Spring 2003

CCOF's value system embraces this inherent tension because it represents various points of view that we all enjoy and have a right to pursue. So although the comments contained in this document may not represent the unanimous opinion of all CCOF members, it represents an inclusive effort by CCOF members and staff. We're used to being involved in issues that have no easy answers, and in working through differences to arrive at a place where the consumer has an absolute right to know how his/her food is grown and handled, and a right to choose food based on that knowledge. CCOF has a tradition of thinking big and of being visionary. Organic IS visionary.

### **What is your vision for California agriculture by 2030?**

CCOF's vision of California in the year 2030 is:

The AG VISION process results in new policies and programs that have practical application, that are well-funded and carried out by a government that regulates as necessary, but doesn't regulate a producer out of California.

Land use policies have created a system that protects California's extraordinarily high quality soils for agricultural production and encourages building on land that is of poorer agricultural quality. This is accomplished through a system of voluntary programs and government incentive programs that are well-designed and adequately funded.

California's farmers produce organic food by emphasizing the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. This food is grown according to standards set by the USDA National Organic Program. Food is produced without using conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineered products, ionizing radiation, or nanotechnology. Meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones, that are not cloned or the progeny of cloned animals, and that are raised and slaughtered humanely.

To make sure farmers, ranchers and handlers are using these standards, an accredited certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to the local supermarket or restaurant are certified and inspected as well, so that the integrity of the system that grows food using renewable resources, conserving soil and water, and enhancing environmental quality for future generations is guaranteed.. Most supermarkets, coffee shops, cafes, restaurants, and institutional food service outlets have been certified organic. Social equality, social and environmental justice have become the norm in California's food system. Farmers, workers, communities and trading partners benefit from an enterprise where people earn good salaries and benefits, where the wealth is shared equitably, where there are no more "food deserts."

Certification is performed by a network of USDA accredited non-governmental certifiers, not by government entities. This is true for inputs, commodities and equipment. This eliminates government monopoly and public subsidies of something that should be done in the private sector.

Crops are protected from genetically engineered contamination spread by genetically engineered crops and growers are compensated for any contamination, intentional or otherwise.

California consumers have a choice about what food they buy, and they can influence agricultural production by their choices. They are able to make informed choices because food products are accurately labeled.

Integrated Pest Management has become the norm, and most producers have gone beyond this baseline to management systems that reflect contemporary technical knowledge about how to produce food, feed, and fiber with the least negative impact on human health and the environment.

Farming is profitable and workers are well-cared for. People who work in agriculture, including farm laborers, are well paid and get medical and retirement benefits.

Toxic chemical inputs will have diminished to a point where private companies no longer want to manufacture them because there is such a small market demand for them.

Alternative input markets are healthy and growing, with the products being available from local and/or regional sources, thereby decreasing input costs even more. These alternatives are based on biological and whole system approaches to farming.

Urban centers have food waste compost programs, benefitting California's growers, decreasing input into the landfills and improving air and water quality.

Community gardening in urban centers is the norm.

Land ownership is available to a wide economic range of would-be farmers.

California continues to produce most of the vegetables, fruits and nuts for itself, the US and many countries in the world.

Processing and handling have improved, the businesses are clean and safe, and wages and benefits are good.

The National Organic Program has evolved as the organic industry evolves, and continues to protect the integrity of the organic growing and handling. The California State Organic Program has been reformed so that it truly serves its constituents (farmers, ranchers, handlers, certifiers, and consumers) by enforcing the NOP and maintaining the integrity of organic.

Farming, processing, storage and transportation systems have rapidly evolved into a net-zero energy system, since by 2030 fuels will be greatly diminished, and reliance on early 21<sup>st</sup> century systems would result in worldwide famine.

Both the United States' and California's state border protection programs are well-funded and implemented. When an invasive pest or disease effects California, the federal and state

governments have developed eradication, control or management plans that are effective against the pest or disease while causing the least harm to humans and non-targeted species, and while protecting California's water and air. California's consumers understand the nature of invasive species and why it's important to be proactive against them. The politicization of an eradication plan has been entirely removed from the realm of reality.

### **What will be the biggest challenge in achieving that vision?**

Will we even have agriculture in California in 2030? Right now, agriculture is squeezed by regulatory and economic pressures, by public misperceptions, by the loss of agricultural land, by increasing fuel costs and infestations of invasive pests and diseases, and by an ever-increasing industrial global economy and food system. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing us is increased population. Other crucial issues include:

An aging farm population and lack of replacement farmers and ranchers;

Water availability and quality;

Energy costs and availability – this includes not only finding options to fossil fuels, but phasing out nitrogen-based fertilizers that are produced through the haber process, and developing a systems that maintain nitrogen within the system, or bringing in nitrogen only through a biological process;

Labor availability.

### **In 2030, how has the public perception of agriculture changed?**

Californians understand and value their food system. They prefer to purchase locally produced food that have been grown organically. They are confident that their food is safe and healthful, and that it has been grown in a way that is good for the environment. They know that the growers and handlers producing their food have earned good livings and receive benefits.

Californians are willing to sacrifice other things, such as inexpensively built housing, lots of roads, and disposable goods with short life spans, in order to maintain an agricultural component in their community planning. They are willing to pay a fair price for their food that reflects the true cost of providing this food. So while food will become increasingly expensive, greater priority is given to simply feeding people, as opposed to developing niche markets for only upper middle and upper class consumers.

California has more farmers markets, open more days a week, and other alternative marketing schemes such as CSAs and cooperatives, so that more people have access to fresh, locally-grown foods.

Schoolchildren are required to learn about farming and food systems in school. They take frequent field trips to working farms and it's their favorite thing to do. Most schools have their own gardens,

## **What is a "must have" in an Ag Vision for California?**

Regulatory and consumer support for appropriate low fossil fuel projects that serve the needs of farms, such as grazing in orchards.

Research to develop methods of producing sufficient nitrogen on the farm from the natural conversion of atmospheric nitrogen.

Agricultural production in California that is regulated for the right reasons but not regulated to the point where there is no longer any agricultural production in California.

A regulatory system that is logical, not contradictory, cross-disciplinary, well-funded and implemented fairly, but that doesn't drive agriculture out of the state. A technical assistance component to help farmers, ranchers and handlers meet regulatory requirements.

Open communication between State agencies, non-governmental organizations, producers, and consumers.

Certified organic farms, livestock operations and processing facilities that operate organically (under the USDA NOP).

All organic operations are good for human health and the environment and include the following components: no genetically engineered components; no irradiation; no sewage sludge; no clones or ingredients from cloned animals; fair labor practices, wages and benefits; Food that is contaminant free; eradication; control and management plans for invasive species are in place.

CCOF thanks you for undertaking this important task, and we look forward to helping you implement the changes necessary to see this AG VISION become a reality.

Kindest regards,



Peggy Miars, Executive Director