

# A B L U E P R I N T FOR THE TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS IN CALIFORNIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Farmers are stewards of the land, soil, water and other ecosystem services that are the basis of agricultural productivity. Consumers want safe, healthy food that will neither pollute water and air, nor threaten wildlife. However, industrial agriculture, the predominant approach, damages soil, water, air, and biodiversity, and leaves a toxic legacy. Toxic synthetic chemicals used on crops pose a significant threat to public health. Many of these chemicals are associated with cancers, compromised reproductive and neurological systems, and developmental problems in children. Concentrated animal feeding operations are the source of antibiotic resistant pathogens, cause water pollution from manure runoff and lead to a range of other public health concerns.

Some progress is being made. With adequate support, farmers have demonstrated their willingness to adopt ecological agricultural practices and make them work. California leads the nation in the production of organic food, now the fastest growing segment of the food industry. Organic farmers have proven that food can be grown safely, nutritiously, and abundantly without the use of toxic synthetic chemicals or genetic engineering.

The conventional, industrialized path is not inevitable or necessary. Unfortunately, significant barriers obstruct the transition to agricultural sustainability in California. Major new investments are needed in research, development, and education. The transformation must be supported by the University of California and other major research institutions, commodity groups, consumers, policy makers, and all who have a stake in California's future. Sustainable agriculture must also take into account the role of global trade and corporate consolidation, the viability of family-scale farms, the welfare of farm workers, and the vigor of regional community food systems.

The Funders Agriculture Working Group (FAWG) offers the following Blueprint for the Transition to Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems. The Blueprint is a work-in-progress and is intended to serve as a guide for action. As progress is made in California's transition to sustainable agriculture, the Blueprint will be updated to address the evolving needs of the present and new opportunities for the future.

**I. Leaders in state government and at the University of California (UC) have an opportunity to shape a new agricultural model for the nation and the world.**

To make this dramatic shift, California’s state leaders should

- A) Commit significant resources to Cal/EPA, the Department of Food and Agriculture, and state water agencies to assist farmers in the transition to sustainable alternatives. They should also increase funding for UC programs that emphasize on-farm research in organic and sustainable agricultural systems.
- B) Incorporate sustainable agricultural practices into state funding protocols that target pollution prevention and remediation for air, water, soil, and biodiversity; and economic development and land preservation.
- C) Establish a multiyear training program for the UC Cooperative Extension in order to place experts in sustainable and organic farming systems in every region of the state.
- D) Recruit organic growers and others who use sustainable practices to serve on advisory boards, influential committees, and blue-ribbon panels.
- E) End the control of UC’s research agendas by biotechnology and chemical companies, and adopt effective conflict-of-interest policies that protect public investment.

**II. State and federal agencies should be key players in making the transition to sustainable agriculture.**

The implementation of programs designed to further sustainable agriculture requires the full-fledged cooperation of state and federal agencies. With political leadership at the cabinet level, agencies must be

empowered to support whole-systems approaches by:

- A) Creating interagency working groups to coordinate financial and technical support for growers in transition to sustainable practices.
- B) Adopting model policies to encourage commodity boards to devote resources to organic and sustainable agriculture research.
- C) Establishing statewide programs of crop insurance and production loans for farmers who use sustainable and organic practices.
- D) Providing a statewide network for institutional buyers to obtain organic food. The network should include public agencies, colleges and universities, school districts, and hospitals.
- E) Protecting and expanding the state’s network of certified organic farmers’ markets and direct-marketing alliances between producers and consumers.
- F) Developing programs to recognize and reward farmers for protecting and renewing ecosystem services.

**III. Existing state and federal laws to protect public health and the environment must be vigorously implemented and enforced.**

As the ill effects of chemical-intensive agriculture become apparent, pollution prevention statutes have been brought to bear on the industry. These tools will continue to be important incentives to encourage the transition by:

- A) Encouraging farms and dairies to protect water supplies from leaching and runoff through full implementation of the state and federal Clean Water Acts. (U.S. EPA and Cal/EPA)
- B) Eliminating the most toxic pesticides by prompt implementation of the Food Quality Protection Act. (U.S. EPA)

- C) Fully implementing the state’s Proposition 65 requirements and Toxic Air Contaminant program.(Cal/EPA) (Proposition 65 requires manufacturers to provide consumer warnings or remove chemicals that the state’s experts determine to be carcinogenic or teratogenic.)
- D) Setting and strictly enforcing pesticide use reduction goals. (California Department of Pesticide Regulation)
- E) Establishing and enforcing strong health and safety standards at the federal and state levels to protect farm laborers and their children; and creating economic incentives for growers to maintain steady employment and fair treatment of farm workers.
- F) Prohibiting hazardous waste in fertilizers. (Cal/EPA and the California Department of Food and Agriculture)
- G) Increasing monitoring and reporting of water, air, soil, biological resources, and public-health impacts of agriculture throughout California, including routine monitoring for the presence of toxic chemicals in human blood and urine, especially among farm workers and children.
- H) Maintaining and enforcing state and federal laws and regulations that protect endangered species so that habitat preservation is enhanced by sustainable agriculture.

**IV. California must take into account how global trade and agricultural consolidation affect labor, food security, family-scale farmers, and community-based food systems.**

Policymakers can help ensure that local interests are not subsumed in the global economy by:

- A) Implementing systems of full (true) cost accounting for industrial agriculture to provide more accurate data on the full range of external costs shifted to, and inequitably paid for, by the public.

- B) Restoring competitive markets by regulating and curbing corporate economic concentration.
- C) Developing strategies to protect and revive rural communities and economies.
- D) Supporting education and infrastructure aimed at building direct connections between farmers and consumers, and between agriculture and society.
- E) Ensuring agricultural workers a livable income and a safe, healthy workplace.
- F) Requiring accurate labeling of genetically modified food and ingredients.
- G) Promoting local food security — affordable, adequate, and appropriate food from non-emergency sources — through sustainable community food systems and urban agriculture.

**V. Individual consumers, scientists, and farmers can foster the growth of sustainable agriculture.**

Making sustainability the dominant paradigm in 21st-century agriculture will require widespread action by many individuals who can help.

- A) Consumers can purchase organic food, buying through farmers markets and cooperatives, and voicing their preferences as consumers.
- B) Social scientists and other agriculture researchers can: 1) work on systems-based methods of understanding agriculture, 2) define a public-interest research agenda, broadening the audience for information on sustainable agriculture, and 3) support multidisciplinary approaches, including on-farm research by scientists.
- C) Farmers can incorporate ecological and organic agricultural practices; demand government resources for making the transition; and share information with other farmers, researchers, and the public.

D) Advocates, farmers and others can build, join, and work for organizations and professional associations that support and encourage sustainable agriculture and the rights of farm workers. They can also champion sustainable agriculture within established organizations such as commodity boards.

**VI. Increased and effective grant making for sustainable agriculture by the philanthropic community can have a significant impact.**

The philanthropic community can help build the capacity of existing organizations that work on sustainable agriculture and related issues. We need strong, viable organizations that can carry out strategies for change and take advantage of opportunities when they arise. Grant makers can help in this effort by:

- A) Providing ongoing general support for organizations that are effective agents of change.
- B) Supporting effective grassroots organizing, especially in agricultural regions of California, to educate the public about the benefits of sustainable agriculture.
- C) Encouraging farmers, public-health officials, the medical community, and national environmental organizations to collaborate, broaden, and strengthen the sustainable agriculture movement in California.
- D) Educating consumers about the environmental, public health, and social benefits of buying food and fiber produced with sustainable practices.
- E) Including sustainable agriculture as an important part of an environmental and/or a public health grant making agenda.

**VII. The philanthropic community should support the development of a public interest research agenda for sustainable agriculture.**

A substantial increase in grant making for sustainable agriculture research is necessary and must include major new public and private sources of funding. Initial funding opportunities include:

- A) Creating a substantial and renewable pool of funds for on-farm research and policy development that facilitates raising funds from other sources.
- B) Working with farmers, policymakers, and scientists to establish a public interest research agenda for sustainable agriculture and implementing it through major research institutions such as the University of California.
- C) Convening regular meetings of public interest research participants to assess progress, identify funding opportunities, and coordinate action.
- D) Developing a comprehensive inventory of funding sources for sustainable agriculture including federal, state, and regional agencies and other institutional programs designed to protect natural resources and public health.

For more information on the Funders Agriculture Working Group or the Blueprint, please call **415-989-9839** or **415-986-5179** or visit **www.FAWG.org**.