

Delta is key to California's economy

Foundation committed to restoring the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem and ensuring a reliable water supply for California.

A.G. Kawamura, Orange County Register, 10-27-11

Kawamura was California Secretary of Food and Agriculture, 2003-10. He is a board member for the Delta Vision Foundation

California's agriculture industry is facing critical challenges from a series of mounting pressures. The state's population is projected to reach almost 60 million people by 2050; this impending growth, along with effects from climate change, resource depletion and energy insecurity, raises the question of how agriculture will fare in the new millennia.

It may come as a surprise to many that California is the fifth-largest agricultural economy in the world, surpassed only by the United States, European Union, Brazil and China. California's 2010 record-breaking farm gate (net value of the product when it leaves the farm) was \$37.5 billion. This number, during a time of significant economic downturn in other industries, should raise attention for the agricultural sector.

However, the general public and the political/regulatory leadership of our state do not uniformly understand the remarkable asset of food, fiber and fuel production capacity that remains California's great competitive advantage. Central to that capacity is the use and availability of water. For farmers, much of that water comes through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which is facing myriad challenges of its own.

The potential for collaborative and creative planning for water sustainability within the Delta can only be accomplished when all the stakeholders have a broad-based understanding of the Delta's complex problems and opportunities.

The Delta Vision Foundation is committed to expanding the horizons through which a sustainable and thriving Delta might emerge. In a recent roundtable discussion with state water leaders and resource experts, we addressed four topics critical to advancing California's agricultural economy while addressing important needs identified in the Delta Vision Strategic Plan:

- The future of sustainable agriculture and new approaches for crop selection and water management to increase agricultural productivity while reducing water use and agricultural runoff;
- Transportation of agricultural products to improve the efficient movement of agricultural goods (and other freight) while reducing road trips and the associated congestion and carbon emissions;
- The development of renewable energy sources (like wind and biomass) that can make significant contributions to reducing the carbon footprint of California's water system;
- Increased attention and development of new programs to address the threat of invasive species on water supplies, habitats, crops, and native species.

Each of these important topics reflects the Delta Vision Foundation's commitment to the two co-equal goals of restoring the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem and ensuring a reliable water supply for California. These sustainable solutions incorporate the principles of integrated action to benefit the environment and California's economy simultaneously.

The Delta Vision Strategic Plan recommended a comprehensive set of integrated and linked actions to achieve the two co-equal goals. It also underscored a sense of urgency that needs to be recognized by state decision-makers.

California's farmers feed the world, and the Delta feeds the state's farmers. Given the daunting challenges ahead, now is the time to implement the Delta Vision Strategic Plan and ensure a healthy future for both.