

Agriculture Update Consensus Form

Getting Started

Are you ready to continue? Do you have your League ID and answers/comments ready to enter?

Yes

General Information

Based on the League ID you entered, you are submitting a response for the LWV Of San Joaquin County.

Your League's official email is reported in the box below. If the box is empty, please enter a valid email address for one of your League's leadership (other than the recorder.)

If the box is not empty (and the email is valid), simply continue to the next question

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How many members from your League participated in the consensus process?

9

Please provide the following contact information for the "recorder" who is submitting the consensus responses on behalf of LWV Of San Joaquin County.

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League ID

CA028

State

CA

Economic Health of the Agricultural Sector

1. Should government financial support for agriculture be directed to:

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Subsidized agricultural credit (loans)	X			
b) Disaster assistance	X			
c) Crop insurance	X			
d) Farms that supply local and regional markets	X			
e) Subsidized implementation of best management practices	X			
f) Commodity crop programs, e.g., corn, soybeans, sugar, cotton, wheat		X		
g) Commodity livestock program			X	
h) Commodity dairy program			X	
i) Specialty crops, e.g. fruits, vegetables, nuts, etc.	X			
j) Other production methods, e.g. organic, hydroponic, urban, etc. farms	X			

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

a: We take “subsidize” here to mean “make available at reduced interest rates with the expectation of repayment.” Unlike crop subsidies that guarantee farmers a fixed income, agricultural loans are made and credit is extended by commercial lenders and suppliers, discouraging default.

b: We favor disaster assistance except in situations where farmers repeatedly plant crops inappropriate to the region. For example, farmers who plant permanent crops in regions that may be subject to drought should not be repeatedly eligible for disaster assistance.

c: Government should not cover insurance company’s administrative expenses. Care should be taken to ensure that crop insurance is not abused by farmers growing crops that could reasonably be expected to fail.

f,g,h: Presumably, commodity crops and programs would be covered by the different kinds of financial assistance we support for a, b, c, d, and e, and would therefore not require additional financial assistance.

i and j: We do support additional financial assistance for specialty crops and alternative production methods, which may tend to benefit smaller farmers and those who choose to farm organically. Our consensus view was that government financial support should encourage smaller farms and non-traditional production methods.

2. What changes should government make regarding direct payment programs to farm operators?

Note: Farm operators can be anything between family farms to huge corporations.

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) <i>Eliminate</i> direct payments to farm operators	X			
b) <i>Update</i> the rules for direct payments to farm operators to support sustainability				X
c) <i>Broaden</i> the types of farms that are eligible				X
d) <i>Broaden</i> the types of crops that are eligible				X
e) Effectively <i>enforce</i> existing rules				X

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

b, c, d, e: Since we favor eliminating direct payments to farm operators, these additional questions appear to be irrelevant.

3. What changes to current crop insurance programs should government make?

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Extend to more types of crops	X			
b) Link to the use of conservation practices	X			
c) Limit insurance for the cultivation of marginal and environmentally sensitive land	X			
d) Cap amount of premium subsidy to a single farm operator (see note in question 2)	X			

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

b: In particular, crop insurance should be linked to water conservation practices.

4. Should government act on any of the following?

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Revise anti-trust legislation to ensure competitive agricultural markets	X			
b) Enforce anti-trust laws as they relate to agriculture	X			
c) Promote alternative marketing systems, including regional hub markets, farmer cooperatives, farm markets, etc.	X			

Animal Management

5. Which of the following approaches to animal management should government achieve?

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Transparently collect and disclose data about regulated animal feeding operations (AFOs) or aquaculture operations and about the health of animals in such regulated operations	X			
b) Apply and enforce existing clean air and clean water regulations to animal or seafood management facilities	X			

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

a: Although it is important to collect data about regulated AFOs, the reporting requirements can be cumbersome and costly for farmers and ranchers when different levels of government (federal, state, county, special districts) require different information. Uniform reporting to different levels of government would lessen the burden of monitoring and reporting.

b: Care must be taken that enforcement of air and water quality regulations does not fall unfairly on farming operations in basins where air and water quality are also compromised by a wide range of non-farming activities.

6. Which of the following approaches to animal waste management should government require or bring about?

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Treat animal waste with environmentally sound technologies for all regulated AFOs (Yes, No, No Consensus)	X			
b) Prioritize federal funds to mitigate existing environmental challenges (such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program, cost share, loans, etc.) rather than construction of new facilities (Yes, No, No Consensus)	X			

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

b: We favor mitigating existing environmental challenges rather than construction of new facilities provided that there are also appropriate penalties for operators responsible for the poor condition of existing facilities.

Research and Development

7. Which of the following approaches to research and development (R&D) should government fund or accomplish?

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Basic research	X			
b) Independent third-party (such as an academic institution) risk assessment of products <i>developed using any new technology</i>	X			
c) Research to assess the impacts of <i>new technologies</i> on human health and the environment, prior to their widespread adoption	X			
d) Research that advances the continuation of diversified and sustainable agricultural systems	X			
e) Seed banking, research, and other means that promote and preserve genetic diversity	X			
f) Both transparency in the reporting of research studies related to approval of new products and respect for intellectual property rights of private enterprises engaged in research	X			
g) Research on long-term effects of new crops, products and processes	X			
h) Development of new practices and technologies to promote conservation for all types of farms	X			

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

b: We have some concerns about the actual independence of some third-party government-funded research because of the involvement at high levels of the federal bureaucracy of people associated with corporations that have themselves been the object of regulatory scrutiny.

f: We agree that research transparency must be balanced with respect for intellectual property rights, but consumer safety must be the primary consideration.

g: There needs to be clarity about the meaning of "long-term effects." In a laboratory, "long-term" may refer to three generations of mice. We are concerned that there be an ongoing commitment to monitoring effects of new technologies.

h: We favor R&D funding to promote conservation for all types of farms, large and small, using either traditional or alternative methods of production.

Food Safety

8. Which of the following approaches to food safety should government perform or fund?

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Clarify and enforce pre-market testing requirements for new foods and food additives <i>developed using any new technology</i> (see note above question 7)	X			
b) Require developers to monitor all food products <i>developed using any new technology</i> after releasing to the market	X			
c) Withdraw marketing approval if products are shown to be unsafe	X			
d) Require post-market monitoring of approved pharmaceutical applications in animal production for human health and environmental impacts	X			
e) Require developers of new products to provide data and other materials to independent third-parties (such as academic institutions) for pre- and post-market safety assessment as appropriate	X			
f) Limit use of antibiotics in animal production to treat and control disease	X			
g) Fund independent third-party (such as academic institutions) risk assessment of long-term and multiple exposures from foods on human health and the environment	X			
h) Promote crop management practices that decrease dependency on added chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic fertilizers)	X			
i) Fund, train and add personnel for assessment and compliance functions of regulatory agencies	X			

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

a: We need assurances that new foods and food additives are safe before they are marketed. But it isn't clear to whom results of food safety evaluations would be reported. Because the results of genetic engineering have been classified as "foods," the FDA doesn't require that they be tested for product safety as, for example, children's toys are.

b: The intent here is unclear when the item is combined with the introductory question. Should government require developers to monitor food products developed using new technology after those products are released to the market? Yes. Should government "perform" that requirement? This would seem to entail funding for regulators to oversee developers monitoring products. Should government fund the monitoring required of developers? No. Our "yes" answer assumes that government should require developers to monitor products after their release and should provide regulators to ensure that that is done.

c: Again, the intent of the question is unclear.. How would government perform or fund withdrawal of marketing approval of unsafe products? Our "yes" answer here assumes that if monitoring as referred to in "b" determines a product to be unsafe, it should of course be removed from the market (recalled). But by whom?

Food Labeling

9. How sufficient are the following regarding current food labeling?

	Insufficient	Sufficient	Too much	No Consensus	No Response
a) Nutrition Facts on food labels	X				
b) Nutrition Facts on food labels as a means of consumer education				X	
c) Common allergen labeling		X			
d) Health and ingredient claims that consumers can understand	X				

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

a: Nutrition Facts on food labels are insufficient to the extent that they do not provide the information listed under Question 11. Also, percentage of daily value figures are not meaningful for a range of daily values, and to that extent may be misleading, although we did not necessarily agree about how much information the manufacturer should be obligated to provide.

b: We could not reach consensus on food labeling as a means of consumer education. It is not clear to us that consumer education is a manufacturer's responsibility, although consumer information is a responsibility.

10. Which of the following should government achieve regarding marketing and ingredient claims on food labels?

	Yes	No	No Consensus	No Response
a) Define (and approve for use) health and safety marketing terms (e.g. immunity support, humane, pasture-raised, natural, etc.)	X			
b) Regulate the use of images or other sensory advertising		X		
c) Require that ingredient marketing claims accurately represent what is in the required ingredient list	X			

11. Recognizing that each food developed using any new technology can be unique, and assuming that required food labeling should be useful to consumers, should the following generalized information relating to how products or components are developed be presented on food labels?

Note: See note above question 7. All these questions also assume some percentage threshold of new technology ingredients, such as the 0.9% used in the European Union.

	Not Recommended	Voluntary	Mandatory	No consensus	No Response
a) Contains ingredients developed using any new technology stating which technologies are involved			X		
b) Does not contain ingredients developed using any new technology		X			
c) If meat, fish, eggs, or dairy products are from animals that have consumed feed developed using any new technology stating which technologies are involved			X		

Comments (word limit: 200. Please include the letter(s) of the question sub-category in your comment (i.e. a, b or c)):

a and c: Labeling should indicate that a product contains ingredients having DNA that has been modified in a laboratory to create something that could never occur in nature.

b: We assume that it would be to a manufacturer's advantage to label a product as not containing genetically engineered ingredients, so this labeling can be voluntary.

Final Comments

12. General Comments:

We don't want to make farming harder than it already is for the small and shrinking percentage of Americans who produce our food. We favor some degree of government support, including support for smaller scale production in preference to large-scale methods that may be more efficient. We need to pay more for regulatory oversight, but not with the objective of producing more regulations. We want more regulators only if they facilitate regulatory compliance (make it easier and more effective).

Another area of policy that could encourage smaller farmers and multi-generational farming is estate tax reform.

The prices Americans pay for food do not reflect the true costs to produce it. To the extent that California "feeds the nation and the world," those costs are externalized here as

- below-living-wages and seasonal unemployment for farmworkers;
- compromised water quality for disadvantaged communities in agricultural regions;
- reductions in water quantity and quality for fisheries and the environment;
- groundwater overdraft and aquifer depletion in food-producing regions;
- compromised air quality associated with food production and long-distance transport;
- profit margins that favor large-scale food production over small to mid-sized family farming and ranching.

In California's San Joaquin Valley, oil extraction is now competing with agriculture for water because oil companies can pay more for water than farmers can pay to produce the food we eat.

We need a national agricultural policy that captures the value of food apart from its contribution to the GDP.

We might have had wider participation in our consensus study if we had announced that we were studying food policy. Much of the food that people eat is heavily processed and packaged; it is, in other words, very far removed from farming in people's minds.

We would like to have seen the study address vertical integration.